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MATT DIRKSEN/CHICAGO CUBS/GETTY IMAGES

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COVER PHOTO BY TOM DIPACE

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Baseball America conducted chats with our subscribers tied to our 2026 Top 100 Prospects ranking. Here is a sample of some of the questions we answered.

Does availability of playing time ever factor for rankings? The Dodgers have an embarrassment of outfielders, and I struggle to see where they will all play.

JJ Cooper: Interesting question. My annoying answer would be: "no and yes." For players coming up through the minors: No. Whether Josue De Paula, Zyhir Hope or Mike Sirota play for the Dodgers or one of 29 other teams does not factor. If they are excellent prospects, they will generally find their way into an MLB lineup. Playing time matters more for players who reach Triple-A and then seem to be blocked. If a prospect goes back to Triple-A for a second year, that often leads to concerns about stalled development. Coby Mayo and Kevin Alcantara are examples. Michael Busch was an example a few years ago. Repeating Triple-A raises upside concerns, but it also lowers MLB production potential. If a player reaches the majors at 23 or 24, he will tend to outproduce a player who settles in at age 25 or 26.

Made

Why did Jhostynxon Garcia not make the Top 100 or the 20 who missed? I figured the trade to Pittsburgh would boost his value.

JJ Cooper: He's still in Top 100 Prospects consideration. I'll probably explain some version of this several times, but the gap between being No. 80 and on the list and being 120 to 140 is really small. But the difference between being No. 1 on this list and No. 25 is massive. What seemed to happen is this: As we got more info on some of the draftees, we moved more of them onto the Top 100, which moved others off.

Why the huge drop for Mariners prospects? Have Arroyo, Farmelo, Cijntje and Celesten all really fallen off that much?

Geoff Pontes: In some ways, yes. Michael Arroyo is being moved to the outfield because his second base defense is an issue. Jonny Farmelo needs to stay healthy—he has played 75 games in two years. Switch-pitcher Jurrangelo Cijntje is divisive because he's unprecedented and undersized. Felnin Celesten had more swing-and-miss than we expected.

Do you expect Jesús Made to remain on a similar timeline as Jackson Chourio? Or does developing as a switch-hitter likely slow that progression?

JJ Cooper: So far, Made's timeline has nearly matched Chourio's trek. Chourio's timetable: He signed in 2021 and spent 45 games in the DSL. In 2022 he spent 62 games at Low-A, 31 at High-A and six at Double-A. In 2023, he spent 123 games at Double-A and six at Triple-A. In 2024 he made the Brewers' Opening Day roster. As for Made, he signed in 2024 and spent 51 games in the DSL. In 2025, he spent 83 games at Low-A, 27 at High-A and five at Double-A. In 2026, I'm guessing he spends most of the year at Double-A and reaches Triple-A.

Who are a few sleeper hitters from the 2025 draft who could one day join the Top 100 Prospects?

Geoff Pontes: The Astros' Ethan Frey has the prerequisite plate skills and power. The Royals' Josh Hammond is an exciting prep hitter with upside now that he's not going to be a two-way player. The Astros' Xavier Neyens was a first-rounder but has big blowup potential if he shows more contact than is expected. As far as athletic and toolsy preps: Quentin Young, Nick Becker, Aidan West and Jaden Fauske are prime candidates.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Scan the QR code to read the full Top 100 chat!

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

The 2026 rookie class looks like one of the best this century

by MATT EDDY

Yesavage

Stewart

McLean

Chandler

RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (YESAVAGE), KENT J. EDWARDS/GETTY IMAGES (MCLEAN), JUSTIN BERL/GETTY IMAGES (CHANDLER), JOHN FISHER/GETTY IMAGES (STEWART)

Blue Jays righthander Trey Yesavage set a World Series rookie record with a 12-strikeout start against the Dodgers.

Mets righthander Nolan McLean went 5-1 in eight starts down the stretch and pitched to a 2.06 ERA in 48 innings to nearly guide the floundering club to an NL wild card.

Reds first baseman Sal Stewart batted cleanup in a playoff game. Red Sox lefthander Connelly Early started a postseason game against the Yankees.

Guardians outfielder Chase DeLauter made his MLB debut in the AL Wild Card Series, collecting his first hit and walk in the postseason before ever playing a regular-season game.

Royals catcher Carter Jensen hit .300 with three homers in 20 games for his hometown team. Orioles outfielder Dylan Beavers posted a .375 on-base percentage in 35 games.

Pirates righthander Bubba Chandler struck out 19 and walked zero over 16.2 innings while allowing two runs on seven hits in his final three starts.

Every player cited above retains rookie status for 2026 and ranks in our preseason Top 20 Rookies. **SEE PAGE 56.**

Add it all up, and this year's rookie class could be one of the most productive of the 21st century.

Pitchers McLean, Yesavage and Chandler, along with hitters Jensen, Stewart and Orioles catcher Samuel Basallo already have a foot in the door as 2025 callups. But what pushes the 2026 rookie class over the top are three shortstops who have not yet debuted.

The Pirates' Konnor Griffin, the Tigers' Kevin McGonigle and the Cardinals' JJ Wetherholt are all projected to reach MLB this season, perhaps sooner rather than later. They rank as the No. 1, 2 and 3 talents on the preseason Top 100 Prospects. **SEE PAGE 10.**

In total, 12 of the projected top 20 rookies this year rank as top 20 overall prospects. That is the highest total of the past 15 years, eclipsing the 2016 rookie class by one.

Ten years ago, top rookies included Corey Seager, Byron Buxton, Trea Turner and Blake Snell.

This year's rookie class is so deep that high-end prospects such as Mariners shortstop Colt Emerson, Mets outfielder Carson Benge and Giants first baseman Bryce Eldridge are top 20 overall prospects who are just now receiving their first mention.

Indeed, the future of baseball is in good hands. ■

Trap Toon *by* PAUL TRAP

paultrap@BaseballAmerica.com

TO
MOTO
HI

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is another example of the rare prospect to be graded an 80 hitter.

P100 PROSPECTS

WN'S NEWEST T SENSATION

Kevin McGonigle is a near-perfect hitting prospect

by JJ COOPER

We live in flush times.

Konnor Griffin is the No. 1 prospect in baseball, and he's one of the best prospects we've seen in several years.

As good as Griffin is, Kevin McGonigle has a calling card of his own. The Tigers shortstop is as close to a perfect hitting prospect as we will likely see for a long time.

Some prospects hit the ball harder than McGonigle. Some make a bit more contact. A few might even have better plate coverage and pitch recognition.

But in almost every case, those hitters have strengths and weaknesses. They trade contact for power. They trade aggression for walks, or walks for aggression.

McGonigle manages to do it all without making any sacrifices. Somehow, he manages to be elite at generating power, exercising swing decisions and emphasizing contact. And in that way, he is one of one.

McGonigle is such a well-rounded hitter that it is difficult it to identify a flaw. Let's see if we can find one.

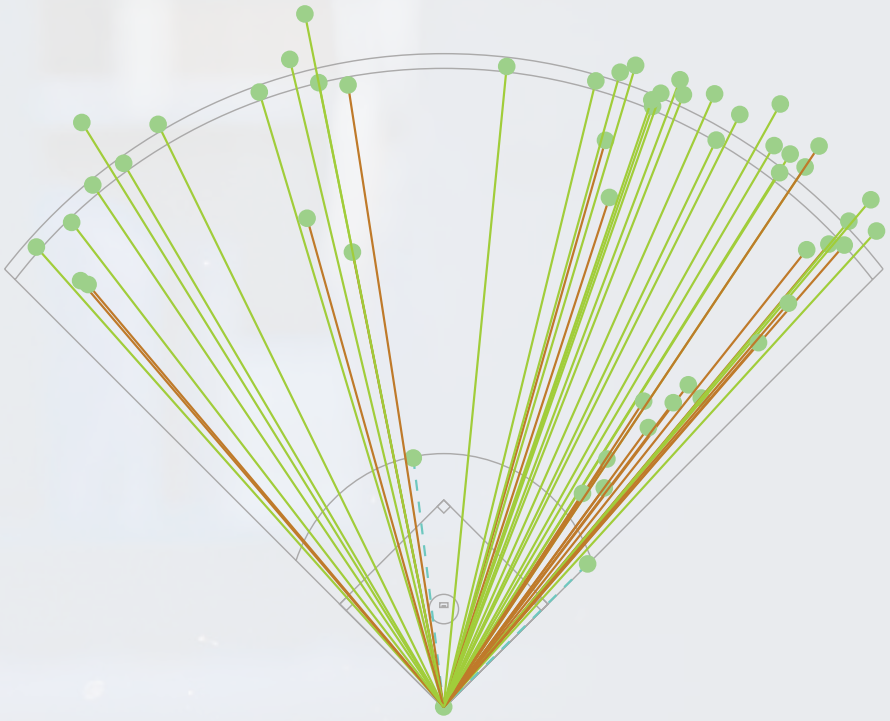
CAN HE HIT FOR POWER?

McGonigle seemed destined to hit for average when he was in high school, but power production was an open question. He was short and compact. He wasn't skinny, but he wasn't as filled out as he is now.

Those concerns have been put to rest. In 2025, McGonigle's .587 slugging percentage was third-best in the full-season minors among qualifiers, and his .278 isolated slugging percentage also ranked in the top five.

McGonigle has demonstrated all-fields power. He has short arms, a fast lefthanded bat and the ability to use his legs in his swing to punish pitchers who try to come in on him for line-drive doubles and home runs. But he's also shown the ability to stay back and drive the ball to left field.

The spray chart below displays McGonigle's distribution of extra-base hits in 2025, which he spent primarily at High-A West Michigan and Double-A Erie.



BRANDON SLOTER/GETTY IMAGES (MCGONIGLE), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (GUERRERO JR.), SYNERGY SPORTS (GRAPHIC)

Analytically, McGonigle ranked in the top 5% of minor league hitters in terms of average exit velocity. He was top 20% in 90th percentile EV and max EV.

CAN HE HIT VELOCITY?

McGonigle doesn't just handle it—he relishes it.

Synergy Sports' data has velocity information for just 43% of the 1,509 pitches logged for McGonigle in 2025, so that is a key caveat here. But of those 92 tracked pitches registering at least 95 mph, he hit .444/.583/.778.

McGonigle swung 47% of the time on those pitches, right in line with his overall swing rate. He hit four singles, three doubles and a home run against pitchers 95 mph and faster.

The home run, hit off a 100 mph Jarlin Susana fastball, was one of the most majestic home runs of the 2025 minor league season.

Against fastballs in general, McGonigle hit .344/.438/.602. He swung and missed just 14% of the time and had 30 extra-base hits.

Clearly, trying to beat McGonigle with velocity may work sporadically, but it's not a plan for consistent success.

HOW WELL DOES HE COVER THE PLATE?

McGonigle may not be the physical specimen that some other top prospects are, but being 5-foot-10 has its advantages.

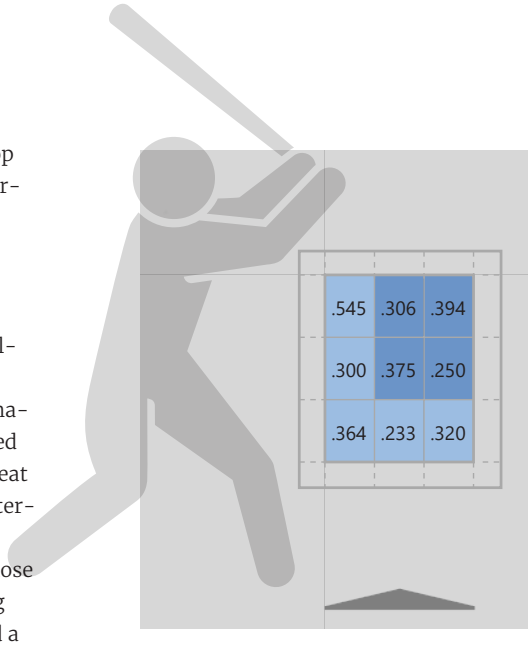
For instance, he has a smaller strike zone than a 6-foot-5 slugger, and his shorter arms also help him controlling the barrel of the bat.

McGonigle's ability to make hard contact in all quadrants of the strike zone is impressive, as the Synergy Sports data illustrates.

Pitchers are best advised to work away against McGonigle. For righthanders, that means working arm side.

If a pitcher can consistently work away from McGonigle in the middle of the zone, there's the hint of a hole there. But even in that location, McGonigle still hits .250 with a .425 slugging percentage.

McGonigle rarely swings and misses, but when he does, it's usually on pitches on the outer third of the strike zone. He is also more likely to take strikes in that outer third.



But even out there, he mashes. Last year, McGonigle hit .316/.320/.480 on pitches in the outer third of the strike zone. Here's some more location data to better illustrate the point:

Middle of the zone (horizontal): .306/.303/.653

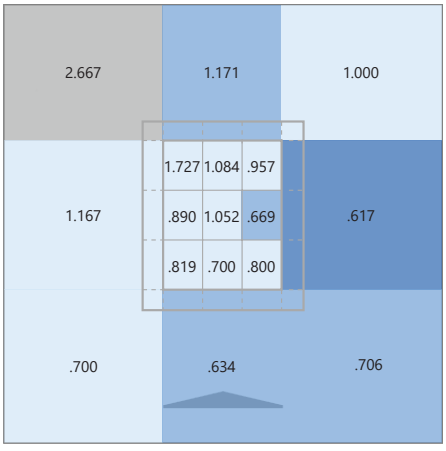
Middle of the zone (vertical): .304/.295/.559

Inner third: .397/.391/.778

Bottom third: .288/.288/.470

Top third: .396/.402/.791

Some advice for opposing pitchers: Avoid up and in at all costs. McGonigle slugged 1.182 there. But, again, there's really nowhere in the zone that will consistently vex McGonigle. Here's his OPS by location:



No point in the strike zone has proven to be a reliable hole pitchers can exploit.

CAN PITCHERS MAKE HIM CHASE?

Minor league pitchers have not consistently beaten McGonigle in the strike zone. Does that imply that the best way to attack him is by having excellent command and working just off the plate?

Ideally, if McGonigle can be induced to chase, he'll have to hit pitchers' pitches.

Well, the problem with that plan is McGonigle doesn't chase pitches out of the strike zone. His chase rate ranked in the top 20% of all minor league hitters. And that stat actually somewhat undersells how well he knows the zone.

Many of the hitters with the best chase rates are overly passive hitters. If one rarely swings, it's much easier to avoid chasing pitches.

To cite an extreme example, Guardians prospect Jaison Chourio walked 18% of the time at High-A and had an elite chase rate by swinging at just 36% of pitches.

McGonigle, however, swings at 45% of all pitches. That combination of aggression and

swinging at strikes is extremely rare. His swing percentage minus his chase rate is in the top 3% of minor league hitters.

So, trying to get McGonigle to chase pitches is unlikely to have much success. And it explains why he has a career .410 OBP as a pro. He wants to hit, but he's happy to take walks, as well.

MAYBE BRING IN A LEFTY?

There's a reason that the Tigers love to draft lefthanded hitters. Hitters who can bat lefthanded had the platoon advantage in 81% of their plate appearances in the majors in 2025. By comparison, righthanded hitters faced lefthanders in 34% of their PAs.

But lefthanded hitters are often relatively helpless when they do get matched up against a lefthander. That's not the case for McGonigle.

He faced lefties in 24% of his plate appearances in 2025 and hit .321/.444/.628 against them. He slashed .300/.396/.569 against righthanders.

Over parts of three pro seasons, McGonigle has shown no issues facing pitchers with the platoon disadvantage. While it might work against many others, bringing in a lefty from the pen has not been a clear path to getting McGonigle out.

SPIN TO WIN?

OK, here's something that actually does work a little bit. McGonigle hit just .216/.361/.454 against breaking pitches in 2025. His miss rate is still solid (25%), but it's significantly higher than it is against fastballs.

Changeups and other offspeed offerings don't offer the same benefit to the pitcher. McGonigle hit .308/.372/.615 against them, with a 21% miss rate.

These are minor flaws on a nearly impeccable résumé. It's not that pitchers can't get McGonigle out. It's just that what worked in the first inning might not work again in the fourth. And pitchers have to be very precise, because most mistakes are punished.

NO MAJOR WEAKNESSES

To quickly summarize: McGonigle does everything well.

In 2025, he was the only minor league hitter to rank in the top 20% of hitters in power (as graded by average exit velocity, 90th percentile EV), swing decisions (swing rate minus chase rate) and contact ability (miss rate and in-zone miss rate) and expected wOBA, a metric that is based on contact quality and trajectory.

Baseball America's minor league analytical data stretches back to 2019.

According to our records, there was no minor league hitter in 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 or 2024 who hit the top 20% in all those marks.

During the 2025 season, McGonigle racked up 52 extra-base hits while striking out 46 times. No other minor league hitter was plus-50 and minus-50 in those categories.

McGonigle has the kind of power and contact combination that is exceedingly rare.

He really is one of one. ■

NORM HALL/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (MCGONIGLE), SYNERGY SPORTS (GRAPHICS)

TOP 100 PROSPECTS

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

How career expectations range across the Top 100 Prospects

by JJ COOPER

A ranking is a useful way to line up prospects. It's simple. It's elegant. When Baseball America founder Allan Simpson and the staff first lined up a Top 100 Prospects ranking in 1990, they set the stage for all other Top 100s that followed. It's a tradition we proudly carry on today.

But as useful as a Top 100 is—and as much as it tickles the part of our brains that looks for nice round numbers—it's not necessarily the best way to look at the ranked players. In reality, nuance is required to interpret our rankings and what they might mean for the future career outcomes of prospects.

Put it this way: For a prospect at the top of this list, anything short of long-term MLB regular status is a disappointing outcome. But one doesn't have to slide too far down our rankings to reach the point where that kind of career would be an exceptional result.

Pirates shortstop Konnor Griffin ranks No. 1 this year. If Griffin goes on to produce 20 or so wins above replacement in his MLB career, that will actually be a disappointing outcome based on his prospect pedigree. It's not unrealistic to expect stardom for players ranked in the top spot, because more often than not, that's what happens.

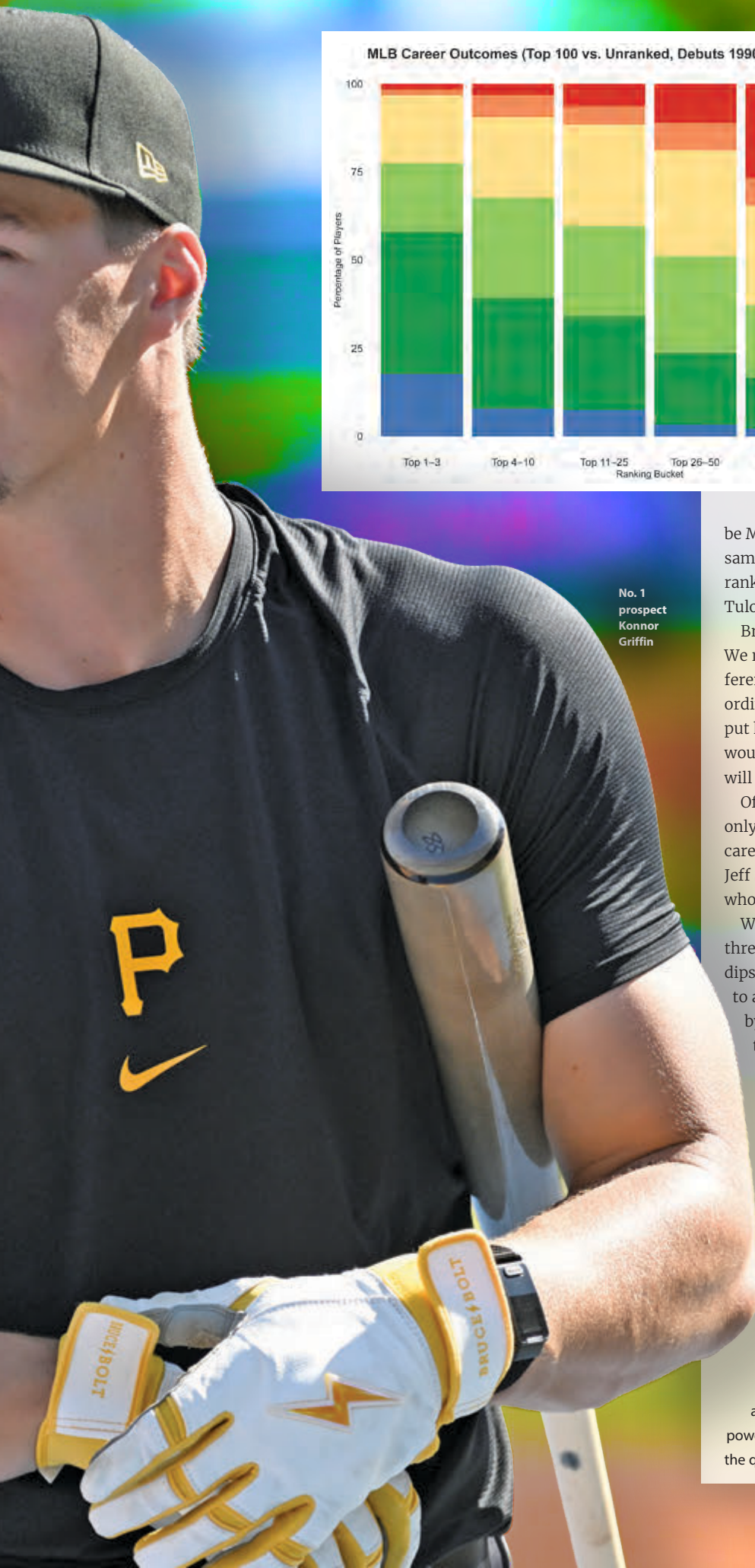
Now, 20 career WAR is a solid career. Neil Walker, Mark Mulder and Jermaine Dye all fall in that range. That's the type of career that often includes an all-star appearance or two and a nice free agent contract.

But for a No. 1 prospect, it's reasonable to expect more. Using Baseball-Reference's WAR metric, just 11 of the 27 players who ranked No. 1 from 1990 to 2019 failed to reach 20 WAR. Only one, Brien Taylor, failed to reach the majors.

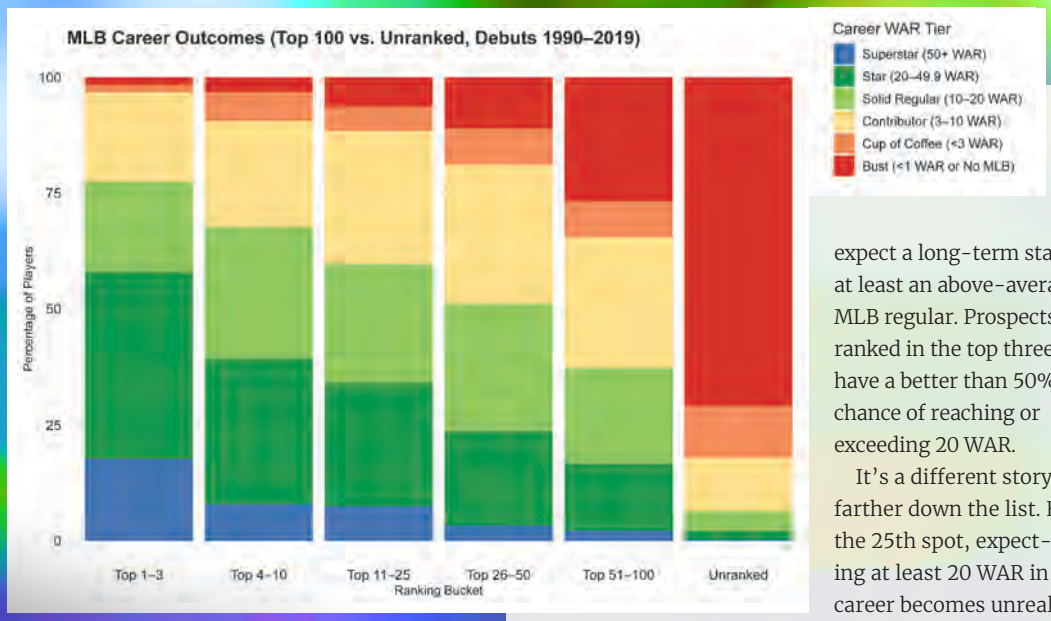
On the flip side, 16 of those 27 top prospects have produced 25 WAR or more, with Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (about 26), Ronald Acuña Jr. (29), Byron Buxton (30), Corey Seager (43) and Bryce Harper (54) likely to still add significantly to their totals. Six have cleared the 50 WAR mark reserved for only the most elite MLB players.

The story is much the same for our annual No. 2 prospect, who this year is Tigers shortstop Kevin McGonigle. All but one of the 29 players who ranked second from 1990 to 2019 have made the majors. Taylor is once again the outlier. Of those 29, 15 have produced 20 WAR or more, and 14 have totaled at least 30. Six have produced 50+WAR, with Shohei Ohtani (52) sure to add more to his total. Xander Bogaerts (42) could get to 50 eventually, too.

For prospects ranked third, such as Cardinals shortstop JJ Wetherholt this year, we find 14 of 27 reached 20+ WAR, while four reached 50+. Even at the No. 3 spot on these rankings, it's reasonable to



No. 1 prospect Konnor Griffin



expect a long-term star, or at least an above-average MLB regular. Prospects ranked in the top three have a better than 50% chance of reaching or exceeding 20 WAR.

It's a different story farther down the list. By the 25th spot, expecting at least 20 WAR in a career becomes unrealistic. For 2026, that would be Mariners lefthander Kade Anderson. He's facing the same long-shot odds that resulted in just two players ranked No. 25 from 1990 to 2019—Matt Morris and Troy Tulowitzki—topping the 20 WAR mark.

Brewers shortstop Cooper Pratt ranks 50th this year. We really like Pratt as a prospect, but that 49-spot difference from Griffin at the top is much more than that ordinal rank may imply. If Griffin has a 20 WAR career to put him in the realm of long-term successful regulars, it would be a disappointing outcome. If Pratt does it, that will be an exceptional outcome.

Of the 30 players who ranked 50th from 1990 to 2019, only one (Andrew McCutchen) has produced at least 20 career WAR. Jeromy Burnitz (19.9), Richie Sexson (18), Jeff Suppan (17.1) and Jackie Bradley Jr. (16.6) are the five who cleared the 15 WAR bar.

While more than 50% of prospects ranked in the top three have reached 20-plus career WAR, that number dips below 40% for players ranked fourth to 10th. It falls to a little over 25% for players ranked 11th to 25th. And by the time you get to 26th and below, it falls to less than one in five.

That's a solid success rate, but the numbers show that those star players aren't distributed throughout the Top 100 so much as they are largely clustered at the top. ■

About the Top 100 Prospects

■ Players qualify for the ranking if they have 130 or fewer major league at-bats or 50 or fewer major league innings in their career. Players also must have 45 or fewer days of active MLB service.

■ Each player's listed age is his baseball age—as of June 30—in 2026.

■ The scouting grades are projected future grades on the 20-80 scale, where 50 is average. Position players are assessed for their ability to hit for average, as well as their power, speed, fielding and throwing arm. Pitchers are graded on the quality of their pitches and their control.

DIAMOND IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

TOP 100 PROSPECTS

#8 NOLAN McLEAN

MICHAEL URAKAMI/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

1. KONNOR GRIFFIN
PIRATES, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.6 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 70. | **RUN:** 80. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 70.

Griffin ascended to the No. 1 spot during the 2025 season and has the position in an iron grip entering 2026. The Mississippi native improved his hit tool in his first full season without sacrificing even a smidgen of his standout athleticism. He has the look of a generational talent.

2. KEVIN McGONIGLE
TIGERS, SS

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.3 mph.
HIT: 80. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 45.

McGonigle earned a rare 80-grade hit tool in the Prospect Handbook, thanks to a cut that blends violence and accuracy into a package that tantalizes. He can damage anything a pitcher can throw and should be a part of Detroit's lineup and infield in short order.

3. JJ WETHERHOLT
CARDINALS, SS

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.6 mph.
HIT: 70. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

Wetherholt was one of the country's purest hitters during his college career at West Virginia, and he's carried those skills into pro ball. He has at least above-average tool grades across the board, and he should impact St. Louis quickly and settle into an everyday role at second or third base.

4. JESÚS MADE
BREWERS, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.2 mph.
HIT: 70. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

Made entered the season with as much hype as any prospect in the sport. He delivered. The Brewers' latest wunderkind advanced from Low-A to Double-A and showed off tools and polish befitting of a much more seasoned player. With a repeat performance, he could reach Milwaukee as a teenager.

5. WALKER JENKINS
TWINS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 102.7 mph.
HIT: 70. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 55.

In one of the healthiest seasons of his career, Jenkins showed the potential that made him such a coveted prospect during his prep days in North Carolina. He needs to tap into more of his power during games, but he has five-tool potential with the chance to stick in center field.

6. MAX CLARK
TIGERS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.8 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 65. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 60.

Clark and Kevin McGonigle give Detroit one of the highest-ceiling pairs in the minor leagues. Clark is a center fielder who offers a blend of tools and skills and has the type of offense-plus-defense profile that often fits near the top of a championship lineup.

7. COLT EMERSON
MARINERS, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.7 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 45. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 50.

In a Mariners system loaded with pitching, Emerson gives the club a middle-diamond jewel. Four of his five tools are average or better, and his card is led by potentially plus hitting ability. He raced to Triple-A in 2025 and could impact Seattle this season.

8. NOLAN McLEAN
METS, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Fastball velocity: 95 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 55. | **SW:** 70. | **CTL** 50.

McLean rose to the front of a pitching-packed Mets system and took his place in the rotation in Queens. His combination of power, precision and unpredictability makes him the best pitching prospect in the sport and should give him a shot to confound hitters for the next decade.

9. SAMUEL BASALLO
ORIOLES, C/1B

Age: 21. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 108.3 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 70. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 70.

The Orioles have already signaled their confidence in Basallo by signing him to a long-term contract extension. His bat has the potential to play anywhere on the diamond, but he'll have plenty of time in the coming seasons to study under incumbent catcher Adley Rutschman.

10. TREY YESAVAGE
BLUE JAYS, RHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Fastball velocity: 94.1 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 55. | **SP:** 70. | **CTL** 50.

Yesavage's ceiling was present throughout his ascent from Low-A to the World Series, where he struck out 17 Dodgers in 12.2 innings. He combines an outlier overhand arm slot with premium stuff and is a slam dunk to pitch in the middle of Toronto's rotation for a long while.

11. CARTER JENSEN
ROYALS, C

Age: 22. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 65.

Jensen's ascent through the minor leagues was fueled by the kind of potent bat rarely found behind the plate. His defense has improved as he has matured, and he appears ready to take the reins from Royals franchise fixture Salvador Perez.

12. LEO DE VRIES
ATHLETICS, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 101.6 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 60.

De Vries was the jewel of the package the Athletics received from the Padres for closer Mason Miller. The teenage shortstop has true five-tool potential and earns pluses for his hitting ability and arm strength. He could be another part of his team's quickly growing core.

13. THOMAS WHITE
MARLINS, LHP

Age: 21. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 95.5 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 70. | **CH:** 65. | **CTL:** 45.

White grades as baseball's best lefthanded pitching prospect thanks to a mix of three plus or better offerings. The lefty has a strong competitive streak and an unwavering desire to neutralize any hitter on the planet. He could reach Miami in 2026 for the up-and-coming Marlins.

14. AIDAN MILLER
PHILLIES, SS

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 106.3 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 60.

The Phillies bet big on Miller in the 2023 draft and have been rewarded with a player who has exceeded his already-lofty expectations. He has the chops to support Trea Turner on the middle infield and should provide plenty of value on both sides of the ball.

15. BUBBA CHANDLER
PIRATES, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 97.7 mph.
FB: 70. | **CB:** 45. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 60. | **CTL:** 50.

The Pirates' pitching depth is as rich as any team, and Chandler fits nicely into a rotation headed by Cy Young Award-winner Paul Skenes. There are still a few edges to sand down, but Chandler's massive potential is slowly turning into reality.

KEVIN ABELE/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

The best individual pitches in the Top 100

This is the fifth consecutive year that Baseball America has ranked the best pitches thrown by Top 100 Prospects. Even over that short window, several future major league stars have graced these articles.

Last year, we highlighted standout 2025 debuts Jacob Misiorowski and Nolan McLean. The 2023 and 2024 editions featured the likes of Hunter Brown, Eury Perez, Grayson Rodriguez, Tanner Bibee, Mason Miller, Cade Horton, Gavin Williams and Bryce Miller. We're confident this year's list will produce more names that will one day light up big league radar guns and baffle hitters with knee-buckling breaking balls.

You'll see a variety of pitch shapes and styles in the charts, which highlight the top fastballs, breaking pitches and offspeed pitches offered up by Top 100 Prospects. This is a reminder that there are a variety of shapes, release traits and spin rates that can produce highly effective pitches. While there is some bias toward certain ideal traits, we weighed the performance of these pitches more heavily.

—Geoff Pontes

** Denotes lefthanded pitcher*

FASTBALL

■ The average fastball velocity for Top 100 Prospects has held steady over the last five years, with the mark falling between 95 and 95.5 mph. While velocity is important for fastball quality, a good starting pitcher's heater doesn't have to be 95 mph or harder. Many derive the most value from release height and movement.

■ Pitches in the accompanying chart are listed in descending order of whiff rate, meaning Red Sox lefty **Payton Tolle** had the best whiff-inducing fastball in the Top 100. The assertion is backed by an elite strike rate, in-zone rate and exciting traits. Tolle's fastball combines above-average velocity from the left side with unique release traits created by his elite ability to get down the mound with seven and a half feet of extension. He also creates more ride than expected from his release height, adding to the combination of traits that has led to pro success.

■ While Mets righthander **Jonah Tong's** improved changeup drew headlines, his fastball was one of the best in the minors in 2025. He saw a jump in velocity, going from the low 90s to 93-96 mph more consistently. While Tong gets above-average extension for his size, his ability to get behind the baseball and create ride and cut allows the pitch to induce high rates of whiffs. Tong's command is fringy, but he strikes a balance of being effectively wild.

■ Marlins lefty **Thomas White's** command is below-average, but there's no denying the nastiness of his fastball. He sits 95-97 mph and touches 100 mph with average ride but heavy armside run. His unique angle drove lots of whiffs last season. Improvements in command could lead to dominant results.

Player	Team	Velo	Max	Spin	IVB	HB	VAA	Ext
Payton Tolle*	BOS	94.8	98.8	2346	17.3	-7.9	-4.55	7.49
Jonah Tong	NYM	94.3	98.4	2249	19.4	3.5	-5.14	6.65
Thomas White*	MIA	95.5	100.6	2299	16.1	-10.3	-4.58	6.13
Jaxon Wiggins	CHC	97.1	99.9	2382	19.1	11.3	-5.06	6.67
Jarlin Susana	WSH	99.7	103.8	2480	14.4	10.9	-4.62	6.48
Bubba Chandler	PIT	97.7	101.7	2453	17.9	8.2	-4.44	6.64
Trey Yesavage	TOR	94.1	96.7	2321	21.2	4.6	-5.66	6.00
Logan Henderson	MIL	93.0	95.8	2283	16.7	11.3	-4.11	6.00
Carlos Lagrange	NYY	98.2	101.7	2497	17.9	11.1	-4.87	5.98
Brody Hopkins	TB	96.6	101.2	2572	16.6	10.3	-3.95	6.49

■ Injuries had masked the upside of Cubs righty **Jaxon Wiggins**, but better health began to find him last season and he threw a career-high 78 innings. There's still plenty of health and relief risk within Wiggins' profile, but his fastball is stellar. He has the best combination of velocity and ride of any pitcher in the Top 100. He sat 97.1 mph in 2025 while generating 19 inches of induced vertical break.

■ Righthanders **Jarlin Susana** (Nationals) and **Bubba Chandler** (Pirates) are repeat inclusions for best fastball. Both continue to throw two of the better heaters in the game. Susana throws both two-seam and four-seam fastballs that sit 99 mph plus. He's the hardest thrower on the Top 100 and has overwhelmed minor league competitors. It could be argued Chandler has the best fastball in terms of metrics on this list, thanks to elite velocity, plus ride and release traits.

BREAKING PITCHES

■ **Jarlin Susana** makes his second appearance thanks to his slider, and it should come as no surprise that the hardest-throwing starter in the minors is a stuff monster. His slider combines an outlier amount of movement and velocity that few pitchers on Earth can match.

■ Righthanders **Ryan Sloan** (Mariners) and **Caden Scarborough** (Rangers) rate highly for their sweepers. Sloan's is harder with less sweep, but it still displays a rare blend of power and movement for a sweeper. Scarborough's slider, while softer, is a high-spin demon with an absurd 16 inches of horizontal break on average. Scarborough shows better command of his sweeper, while Sloan uses his version to expand the zone for whiffs.

■ More so than in past years, the quality of curveballs on the list has improved. **Brody Hopkins'** curveball, in particular, stands above the rest based on raw metrics and is my personal favorite pitch thrown in the minor leagues right now.

Player	Team	Type	Velo	Max	Spin	IVB	HB
Jarlin Susana	WSH	SL	86.2	91.1	2746	-3.2	-9.4
Luis De Leon*	BAL	SL	85.7	90.2	2726	1.4	4.9
Ryan Sloan	SEA	SWP	83.9	86.0	2395	-1.1	-14
Elmer Rodriguez	NYY	CB	79.3	83.7	2417	-9.2	-12.9
Caden Scarborough	TEX	SWP	81.3	84.8	2872	-0.9	-16.2
Brody Hopkins	TB	CB	88.1	93.1	2465	-7.5	-3.9
Tanner McDougal	CWS	SL	87.5	90.4	2584	1.5	-1.6
Connor Prielipp*	MIN	SL	86.7	90.2	3111	-0.8	4.2
Thomas White*	MIA	CB	82.8	86.6	2585	-2.3	10.8
Trey Gibson	BAL	CB	82.4	86.2	2503	-14.2	-9.3

It shows true downer movement with 80-grade velocity for a curve. Hopkins generates outrageous amounts of chase against the pitch, helping the Rays righty to run one of the highest swinging-strike rates on the list.

OFFSPEED PITCHES

■ The best pitch on the offspeed list is Blue Jays World Series hero **Trey Yesavage's** splitter. It had the highest whiff rate of any offspeed pitch in the Top 100 and looks like a plus-plus major league pitch already.

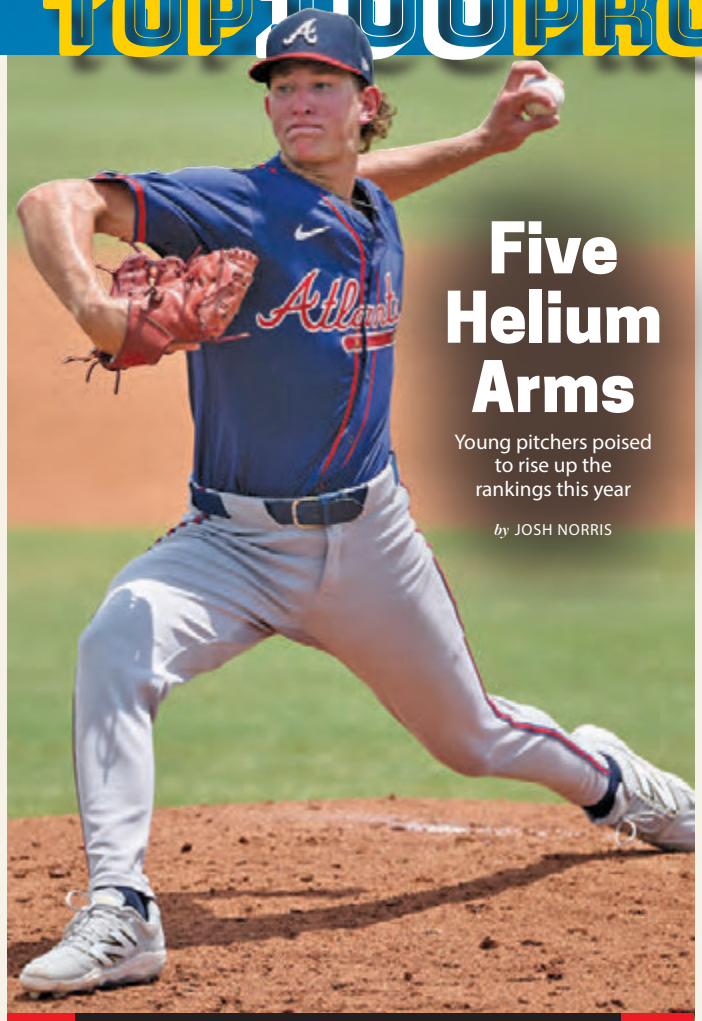
■ Much written was about **Jonah Tong's** improved changeup grip and shape. Now that the dust has settled, it's easy to declare the Mets righty's changeup the best true changeup on the list. He creates a steep plane of separation off his fastball, leading to a truly devastating one-two punch.

■ The Guardians' **Parker Messick** isn't the type of pitcher who blows up stuff models, but he knows how to pitch. His feel for his offspeed is a key piece of the puzzle. His above-average changeup overwhelmed minor league hitters.

■ Red Sox lefty **Connelly Early** put his plus changeup on full display during his MLB debut. Dating back to his amateur days, his ability to miss bats with his offspeed in and out of the zone has driven much of his success.

Player	Team	Type	Velo	Spin	IVB	HB	VAA
Trey Yesavage	TOR	SPLT	83.9	1581	7.8	10.8	-8.91
Jonah Tong	NYM	CHG	83.8	1701	7.9	13.4	-7.45
Parker Messick*	CLE	CHG	84.9	1797	3.6	-14.4	-7.51
Connelly Early*	BOS	CHG	82.5	1346	-2.4	-10.0	-8.03
Luis De Leon*	BAL	CHG	87.8	2199	7.2	-16.6	-7.23
Elmer Rodriguez	NYY	SPLT	87.5	1381	2.7	11.6	-7.38
Thomas White*	MIA	CHG	87.4	1257	2.3	-12.4	-7.58
Bubba Chandler	PIT	CHG	91.4	2071	7.6	16.3	-6.30
Logan Henderson	MIL	CHG	82.4	2458	5.4	18.8	-6.97
Brandon Sproat	MIL	CHG	90.7	1684	3.1	15.4	-7.08

■ Brewers righty **Logan Henderson** spins his changeup similar to a screwball. He has a 2,400-plus rpm spin rate with the most armside run of any changeup. He plays it perfectly off his flatter fastball to create nice plane separation.



Five Helium Arms

Young pitchers poised to rise up the rankings this year

by JOSH NORRIS

LHP **CAM CAMINITI, BRAVES** **#53**

After a rocky start in the Florida Complex League, Caminiti moved to Low-A and brought out the scalpel. The projectable southpaw made some tweaks to his delivery and saw immediate results. His fastball peaked at 97 mph and grades as a potential plus pitch at the head of a mix of three pitches with the potential to be above-average or better. If he adds some strength to his frame, his entire arsenal could take a jump.

RHP **RYAN SLOAN, MARINERS** **#60**

Sloan has just about everything one could want when building a future front-end starter. Three of his four pitches project as 60-grade offerings, and his cutter gives him a fourth average pitch. Sloan pounds the strike zone, too, walking just 15 hitters in 82 innings. His season was cut short by an eye injury that required surgery after just three starts at High-A Everett.

RHP **KENDRY CHOURIO, ROYALS** **#80**

Chourio signed on Jan. 15, 2025, and promptly ran a buzzsaw through the Dominican Summer and Arizona Complex leagues. His success on the backfields forced Kansas City's hand and earned him a promotion to Low-A by season's end. The righthander blends "now" stuff with uncommon poise into a skill set that has helped him ascend to the top of the Royals' system. If he does it again, he could have a case as the best overall pitching prospect.

LHP **LUIS DE LEON, ORIOLES** **#95**

De Leon has dealt with injuries throughout his career, but there's little doubting the electricity in his left arm. In the Arizona Fall League, he stymied hitters with a plummeting mid-90s sinker, a sweeping slider with plenty of bite and a changeup that floated away from righties. That combination allowed him to rack up whiffs and grounders in large quantities. His ceiling is high, and moderate improvements to his control and command would help him capitalize on that potential.

RHP **TANNER MCDOUGAL, WHITE SOX** **#100**

McDougal's performance in 2025 made him one of the most improved pitchers in the minor leagues. The burly righthander cut his walk rate by more than 3 percentage points after moving to Double-A Birmingham. He raised his stock in the process. The uptick in strikes came without a drop in stuff. His fastball and curveball each project to be plus or better, and his slider and changeup give him a well-rounded back end of his repertoire. If his control gains carry into 2026, McDougal could find himself in Chicago by season's end.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (CAMINITI), BILL MITCHELL (SLOAN), BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (CHOURIO), NORM HALL/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (DE LEON), DANNY PARKER/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (MCDOUGAL)

53%
FORTY OF THE 75 DRAFTED PLAYERS IN THE TOP 100 WERE SELECTED IN THE FIRST ROUND

16. PAYTON TOLLE
RED SOX, LHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.8 mph.
FB: 80. | **SL:** 50. | **CH:** 45. | **CT:** 50. | **CTL:** 50.

Tolle's hype started building in spring training and didn't extinguish until the Red Sox's season ended. The owner of one of the nastiest fastballs among prospects, Tolle is a ready-made midrotation starter who should fit in Boston for the long haul.

17. BRYCE ELDRIDGE
GIANTS, 1B

Age: 21. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 107.3 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 70. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 55.

After a rapid rise through the minors in 2024, Eldridge reached the big leagues in 2025 and showed hints of his potential. He needs to sharpen his hit tool to help him access his elite power more often. His recovery from offseason wrist surgery will be worth monitoring.

18. CARSON BENGE
METS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 105.9 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 65.

Oklahoma State alum Nolan McLean has already made his impact in the big leagues. Benge, like McLean a former two-way player, could be the next Cowboy up. He has a chance at five average or better tools and should debut in 2026, potentially on Opening Day.

19. EDUARDO QUINTERO
DODGERS, OF

Age: 20. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90 percentile exit velocity: 103.7 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

None of Quintero's five tools is a knockout, but the breadth of his talent places him at the head of an excellent Dodgers system. Added loft to his swing helped Quintero access his power and fueled his rise with a 19-homer, 47-steal campaign at the Class A levels.

20. DYLAN BEAVERS
ORIOLES, OF

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 105.4 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 70. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

A more efficient swing helped Beavers access more of his talent and fueled him to his big league debut following an MVP season in the Triple-A International League. He showed flashes of his gifts over 35 games with the Orioles and is in position for a longer look in 2026.

21. TRAVIS BAZZANA
GUARDIANS, 2B

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 104.5 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 45.

Injuries muddled Bazzana's first full year and muted the hitting ability that was his signature over three seasons at Oregon State. A clean bill of health in 2026 should allow the 2024 No. 1 overall draft pick a chance to reset and shine, with a callup to Cleveland in the cards.

22. SAL STEWART
REDS, 3B/1B

Age: 22. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 106.9 mph.
HIT: 65. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 30.

Stewart got to the big leagues on the strength of a bat that just didn't quit. Once his power started showing up more often, his path to the big leagues cleared and he finished the year hitting cleanup and holding down first base for the Reds in the playoffs.

23. JOSUE DE PAULA
DODGERS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90 percentile exit velocity: 105.3 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 50.

De Paula has the biggest impact potential of any hitter in the Dodgers' farm system. His 2025 season was strong, but a bit more aggression on pitches he can damage would help him make the most of his overflowing raw juice. He has a chance to make those adjustments in 2026.

24. KADE ANDERSON
MARINERS, LHP

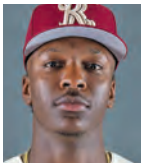
Age: 21. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 93.3 mph.
FB: 55. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 45. | **CTL:** 55.

Anderson's pro debut will be one of the most anticipated in 2026 after he helped lead LSU to its second national championship in three seasons. The Louisiana-bred lefty pitched his way to the No. 3 overall pick and has the arsenal and poise to quickly snag a spot in Seattle's outstanding rotation.

25. NOAH SCHULTZ
WHITE SOX, LHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.5 mph (two-seam).
FB: 65. | **SL:** 70. | **CH:** 55. | **CT:** 50. | **CTL:** 50.

The development of young pitchers, especially 6-foot-10 lefthanders, is not always linear. Schultz wasn't as dominant in 2025 as he was in 2024, thanks in part to patellar tendinitis in his right knee, but he continues to have one of the best pitch mixes in the minors.



26. SEBASTIAN WALCOTT
RANGERS, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90 percentile exit velocity: 106.8 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 70. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 70.

Even after a full season at Double-A, Walcott is still younger than most players who will be drafted out of college in 2026. His tools are as electric as ever, and he has a chance to be a fixture in Texas' lineup for years, no matter where he winds up on defense. His ascent will be delayed by February elbow surgery.

27. CALEB BONEMER
WHITE SOX, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.6 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 50.

Bonemer was one of the breakout prospect stars of the 2025 season. A White Sox 2024 second-round pick out of the Michigan prep ranks, Bonemer manages to blend a solid batting eye, infielder athleticism and alluring offensive potential, headlined by plus power.

28. EDWARD FLORENTINO
PIRATES, OF

Age: 19. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.8 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 55.

Konnor Griffin wasn't the only teenage hitting prospect to emerge for the Pirates in 2025. Florentino shows plus power to go with a plus hit tool as he climbed from Rookie ball to Low-A. He swiped bases as well, but now he needs to improve his outfield defense.

29. BRYCE RAINER
TIGERS, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 108 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 70.

Rainer rivaled Konnor Griffin for the title of best prep shortstop in the 2024 draft class. Griffin blossomed with the Pirates in 2025, but don't forget about Rainer. He impressed with the Tigers' Low-A affiliate before a season-ending shoulder injury in June.

30. JOSUAR GONZALEZ
GIANTS, SS

Age: 18. **Peak:** DSL. **ETA:** 2029.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.6 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 70. | **FLD:** 70. | **ARM:** 60.

Gonzalez was considered one of the best players in the 2025 international amateur class when the Giants signed him out of the Dominican Republic. His pro debut in the Dominican Summer League only added to the expectations. He's a smooth defender with power and hitting ability.

31. ELI WILLITS
NATIONALS, SS

Age: 18. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 97.2 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

The No. 1 pick in the 2025 draft is one of a large crop of prep shortstops from that class who joined the Top 100 Prospects. Willits has a chance for five average or better tools and, down the line, should be the Nationals' shortstop of the future.

32. ANDREW PAINTER
PHILLIES, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 96.8 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 55. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 50. | **SW:** 55. | **CTL:** 60.

In his first year back from Tommy John surgery, Painter's arm slot dropped at Triple-A and his fastball became more hittable. It's believed to be a correctable issue, and if Painter can fix it, he's on path to becoming a midrotation starter. He is poised to make his MLB debut this season.

33. LIAM DOYLE
CARDINALS, LHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 95.8 mph.
FB: 70. | **CB:** 40. | **SL:** 50. | **CT:** 50. | **SP:** 55. | **CTL:** 50.

Doyle dominated the SEC while at Tennessee with an elite fastball that has excellent movement to go with upper-90s velocity. The development of Doyle's secondary offerings will determine how quickly he makes the climb to St. Louis after the club drafted him fifth overall.

34. CHASE DeLAUTER
GUARDIANS, OF

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.1 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

DeLauter made his MLB debut in Cleveland's AL Wild Card Series matchup with the Tigers last year. If he can put a series of foot injuries behind him, he could be the middle-of-the-order outfield bat the Guardians have been searching for years to find.

35. RAINIEL RODRIGUEZ
CARDINALS, C

Age: 19. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.8 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 65. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 60.

Rodriguez has plus hitting ability with even better power. He's one of the best young catching prospects in the game, with a bat that could fit at first base but a glove that should keep him behind the plate. He smashed 20 homers in 84 games last season as he climbed from Rookie ball to High-A.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

TOP 100 PROSPECTS

#40 GAGE JUMP

36. MOISES BALLESTEROS
CUBS, C

Age: 22. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.1 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 50.

Ballesteros can really hit. He batted as high as .316 in a minor league season and hit as many as 19 home runs. There have always been more questions about whether his defense is enough to allow him to catch regularly in the majors. The Cubs are betting on his lefthanded bat, but largely in a DH role for now.

37. BRODY HOPKINS
RAYS, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 96.6 mph.
FB: 65. | **CB:** 70. | **CH:** 45. | **CT:** 65. | **SW:** 60. | **CTL:** 45.

Hopkins was an outfielder until late in his college career at Winthrop. As a pitcher, he has one of the most unusual curveballs in the game. It's a true power pitch that can scrape 90 mph to go with his upper-90s fastball and power cutter, sweeper and changeup.

38. SETH HERNANDEZ
PIRATES, RHP

Age: 20. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2028.
Average fastball velocity: 96.3 mph.
FB: 65. | **CB:** 55. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 70. | **CTL:** 55.

Hernandez stood out in the 2025 high school draft class for the ease with which he could sit in the upper 90s. He has tree trunks for legs and present physicality that should help ease his transition to pro ball. Hernandez throws one of the best changeups seen by a prep righthander in recent years.

39. JAMIE ARNOLD
ATHLETICS, LHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 93.5 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 60. | **CB:** 45. | **CTL:** 55.

Arnold was viewed as one of the best and safest picks in the 2025 college pitching draft class. He isn't particularly big or physical, but the Florida State alum has a plus fastball, slider and changeup to go with a delivery that keeps hitters consistently uncomfortable.

40. GAGE JUMP
ATHLETICS, LHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.4 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 55. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 50. | **CTL:** 55.

Jump combines with 2025 first-rounder Jamie Arnold to give the Athletics a pair of excellent lefthanded pitching prospects. Jump was solid at LSU, but he was even better in 2025 in his pro debut. His mid-90s fastball has proven to be a top-of-the-zone weapon.

41. ROBBY SNELLING
MARLINS, LHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.2 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 55. | **CTL:** 50.

The 2023 Minor League Pitcher of the Year, Snelling's stuff backed up in 2024 and he was traded from the Padres to the Marlins. He bounced back in 2025, showing improved velocity and a sharp two-plane curve. He struck out 166 batters to rank fourth in the minors.

42. AIVA ARQUETTE
MARLINS, SS

Age: 22. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.9 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 45. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

Arquette was the top college infielder in the 2025 draft class. A generation ago, the 6-foot-5 infielder would have been viewed as a future third baseman, but nowadays teams are more willing to let athletic but tall shortstops stick up the middle.

43. OWEN CAISSIE
MARLINS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.9 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 65. | **RUN:** 45. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 60.

Traded from the Cubs to the Marlins in the January Edward Cabrera deal, Caissie is a major league-ready corner outfielder with excellent power. His deal to Miami creates playing time that makes him a stronger Rookie of the Year candidate.

44. JONAH TONG
METS, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.3 mph.
FB: 65. | **CB:** 45. | **SL:** 40. | **CH:** 65. | **CTL:** 45.

Tong earned Minor League Pitcher of the Year honors in 2025, when he led all minor league pitchers with a 1.43 ERA, 179 strikeouts and .148 opponent average. His late-season MLB debut was a bit rockier, but he did show flashes of dominance. His high-slot fastball/changeup combo is unique.

45. MIKE SIROTA
DODGERS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.1 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

Sirota slid in the 2024 draft because of an injury-plagued junior season at Northeastern. The Reds nabbed him in the third round and then traded him to the Dodgers. He starred in the first half of 2025 before a knee injury ended his season early.

46. GEORGE LOMBARD JR.
YANKEES, SS

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.2 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 50.

Lombard has impressed scouts with his smooth, graceful defense at shortstop and his heady approach to the game since the Yankees drafted him in the first round in 2023. Now, they want to see him more consistently unlock his power potential to go with his ability to get on base.

47. LUIS PEÑA
BREWERS, SS/2B

Age: 19. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.2 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 70. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 60.

Peña was teammates with fellow top prospect Jesús Made at two levels of Class A in 2025. It can be hard to stand out when paired with such a star prospect, but Peña made his own name as a well-rounded infielder with speed to burn and an above-average bat.

48. RYAN WALDSCHMIDT
D-BACKS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.3 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 50.

Waldschmidt went from being barely recruited out of high school to starring at Kentucky to being one of the best draft prospects in 2024. He could find at-bats for the D-backs in 2026 as an athletic outfielder who hits for average and power.

49. FRANKLIN ARIAS
RED SOX, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 102.6 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 40. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 55.

Arias has shown advanced hitting ability and skilled defense at shortstop, giving him a high floor as a middle infielder who can grind out at-bats. If he can add power to go with his bat-to-ball skills, he will enhance his ceiling and climb farther up these rankings.

50. COOPER PRATT
BREWERS, SS

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 101.2 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 60.

Pratt is the third Brewers infielder ranked in the top 50, alongside Jesús Made and Luis Peña. While those two may have more upside, Pratt's hitting ability and solid shortstop defense make him a likely MLB regular. He was one of the youngest regulars in the Double-A Southern League in 2025.

51. TYLER BREMNER
ANGELS, RHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 95.3 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 50. | **CH:** 70. | **CTL:** 60.

Bremner's selection second overall raised eyebrows during the 2025 draft, but his potential justifies the investment. He pairs some of the best command in the class with a three-pitch mix headlined by a 70-grade changeup and a mid-90s fastball. Bremner could move quickly.

52. CONNELLY EARLY
RED SOX, LHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 93.5 mph.
FB: 50. | **CB:** 50. | **SL:** 40. | **CH:** 60. | **SW:** 55. | **CTL:** 50.

Early was one of Boston's biggest breakout arms in 2025. He struck out 11 batters in his big league debut and strung together a trio of solid outings, showing the Red Sox enough to trust him to start an elimination playoff game. He has the look of a polished midrotation starter in relatively short order.

53. CAM CAMINITI
BRAVES, LHP

Age: 19. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
Average fastball velocity: 93.6 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 55. | **CTL:** 55.

Caminiti missed two months in 2025 with forearm tendinitis, but he responded with a 31.9% strikeout rate in 56.1 innings with Low-A Augusta. A lower arm slot gave his fastball more life and extension and reinforced his status as the Braves' highest-upside arm.

54. JOSHUA BAEZ
CARDINALS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.1 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 65. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

Baez stands at a muscular 6-foot-3, 220 pounds with 70-grade raw power to match. He addressed swing-and-miss concerns in 2025 by getting more upright and closing his stance, resulting in one of the biggest bounceback seasons. Baez has 30-30 upside.

55. JOE MACK
MARLINS, C

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.1 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 65.

After struggling through his first two full pro seasons, Mack blossomed in 2024 and 2025 by more consistently tapping into an enviable blend of power, patience and defense. A strong start to 2026 could help him force his way into the Marlins' crowded big league catching depth chart, alongside Agustin Ramirez.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

56. RALPHY VELAZQUEZ
GUARDIANS, 1B

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 106.6 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 60.

Velazquez's physical 6-foot-3 frame allows him to create loud contact and exit velocities approaching 114 mph. While he's an aggressive hitter, his strike-zone recognition and contact skills give him a chance to develop into an everyday first baseman with plus hit and power.

57. EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
TWINS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 109.2 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 60.

When healthy, Rodriguez has all-star upside. But he simply can't avoid the injury bug. Rodriguez has yet to play 100 games in a season since making his full-season debut in 2022. He hits the ball quite hard and is a patient hitter, but he'll need to make some adjustments to make more contact.

58. LAZARO MONTES
MARINERS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 108.3 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 70. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 60.

Montes has arguably the best raw power in the Top 100 and 30-homer upside if he can solve some of his swing-and-miss concerns. Montes' aggression can get him into trouble, but he has so far balanced it with higher walk rates and generally strong strike-zone recognition.

59. ELMER RODRIGUEZ
YANKEES, RHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.9 mph (two-seam).
FB: 60. | **CB:** 55. | **SL:** 50. | **CT:** 50. | **SP:** 50. | **SW:** 55. | **CTL:** 60.

The Yankees acquired Rodriguez from the Red Sox for Omar Narvaez, and the righthander broke out in 2025 with the second-most strikeouts (176) among all minor league pitchers. He has a deep five-pitch arsenal and plus control. A big league debut in the second half of 2026 is not out of the question.

60. RYAN SLOAN
MARINERS, RHP

Age: 20. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 95.4 mph.
FB: 60. | **CH:** 60. | **CT:** 50 | **SW:** 60 | **CTL:** 50.

Sloan has a trio of pitches that project as plus, led by a pair of premium secondaries in a low-80s sweeper and wipeout changeup. He also throws a mid-90s fastball. Sloan showcased all three in an impressive pro debut at both Class A levels before an eye procedure ended his season early.

61. DAX KILBY
YANKEES, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 104.2 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 40.

Kilby had the best debut of any 2025 draftee, hitting .353/.457/.441 in an 18-game stint at Low-A Tampa. He blends plus contact with a short, powerful swing and solid defense, though his arm may one day push him off shortstop. Kilby could emerge as the Yankees' No. 1 prospect this season.

62. ARJUN NIMMALA
BLUE JAYS, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.8 mph.
HIT: 45. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 60.

Nimmala was one of the hottest hitters in the minors over the first half of 2025, slashing .289/.372/.538 in 45 High-A games, but he hit just .184 over his final 75. While he runs quite hot and cold, Nimmala's lightning-quick bat speed and shortstop defense give him a chance to develop into an above-average regular.

63. ZYHIR HOPE
DODGERS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 109.3 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 40.

Since being acquired from the Cubs prior to 2024, Hope's first two seasons with the Dodgers revealed both upside and some remaining risk. He flashes high-end exit velocities and above-average speed, but also below-average contact ability. He'll need to close some of those holes in 2026.

64. THEO GILLEN
RAYS, OF

Age: 20. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.2 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 60. | **ARM:** 40.

Gillen's hit tool has been coveted going back to his prep amateur days prior to the 2024 draft, but he has had tough injury luck in pro ball. At his best, he's a contact-oriented hitter who wreaks havoc on the bases, and he has made a smooth transition from shortstop to center field.

65. CADEN SCARBOROUGH
RANGERS, RHP

Age: 21. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2028.
Average fastball velocity: 93.9 mph.
FB: 70. | **SP:** 45. | **SW:** 60. | **CTL:** 55.

Scarborough is no longer a hidden gem. He was the Rangers' best minor league pitcher in 2025, riding a 70-grade fastball that elicits empty swings from a low release height. Scarborough's next challenge is refining his secondaries—and perhaps adding another one—to meet his midrotation potential.

66. JOJO PARKER
BLUE JAYS, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: Did not play.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 55.

Parker was one of the older high schoolers in the 2025 draft class, but he was also one of the bigger risers and offers one of the better blends of hitting ability and power among his draft peers. He's a physical hitter with plus bat-to-ball skills and plus raw power. Parker projects as an above-average regular at third base.

67. ANGEL GENAO
GUARDIANS, SS

Age: 22. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.1 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

The switch-hitting Genao relies on his hit tool and strike-zone recognition, and he has enough pop to produce 15-20 homers in the majors if he can find a bit more loft in his swing. He also plays solid shortstop defense, but he'll need to remain healthy after injury-filled seasons in 2023 and 2025.

68. JARLIN SUSANA
NATIONALS, RHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 99.7 mph.
FB: 70. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 55. | **CTL:** 45.

The lone player from the Juan Soto trade yet to debut for the Nationals, Susana is a mountain of a righthander at 6-foot-7, 283 pounds with a fastball that has touched 104 mph. He has some of the loudest pure stuff in the minors, though there are control questions.

69. KYSON WITHERSPOON
RED SOX, RHP

Age: 21. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 96.4 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 45. | **SL:** 55. | **CT:** 60. | **CTL:** 50.

After adding strength and simplifying his delivery, Witherspoon dominated in 2025 for Oklahoma, and the Red Sox took him 15th overall in the draft, their highest pick ever for a college righthander. He has a five-pitch arsenal, headlined by a fastball that touches 99 mph, and throws consistent strikes.

70. JACOB MELTON
RAYS, OF

Age: 25. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107.7 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 50.

Dealt from the Astros to the Rays in a three-team December trade, Melton is a toolsy addition to Tampa Bay's outfield mix. He's shown above-average contact traits in the minors, but he struggled against spin after making his MLB debut with the Astros. His premium exit velocities could make him a contributor in 2026.

71. JETT WILLIAMS
BREWERS, SS

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.4 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 65. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

Williams rebounded from wrist surgery to deliver a strong 2025 season, splitting time between Double-A and Triple-A while showing his trademark energy and versatility. He combines plus speed, on-base ability and defensive flexibility across the middle infield and center field. He was dealt to Milwaukee in January.

72. TREY GIBSON
ORIOLES, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 94.1 mph.
FB: 55. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 40. | **SW:** 55. | **CTL:** 50.

Gibson went unselected in the shortened five-round 2020 draft. Now, he's a Top 100 Prospect after a breakout 2025 in which he struck out hitters at an elite rate across three levels and reached Triple-A. Gibson works with a pair of mid-90s fastballs, a "deathball" slider and has deepened his arsenal.

73. BRADEN MONTGOMERY
WHITE SOX, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 106.8 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 70.

Montgomery's 2025 season ended early because of a fractured right foot, and he also fractured his right ankle at Texas A&M in 2024. When on the field, he's an aggressive switch-hitter with a violent swing that has led to some swing-and-miss issues. He's on the cusp of a big league debut with a healthy 2026 season.

74. KAELEN CULPEPPER
TWINS, SS

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 102.6 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 60.

Culpepper impressed in his first full pro season, earning a Futures Game nod and hitting .289/.375/.469 with 20 homers. An athletic infielder with a balanced skill set, he handles velocity and rarely misses in the zone. His ultimate defensive home remains unsettled, but he projects as a solid regular.

75. JUSTIN CRAWFORD
PHILLIES, OF

Age: 22. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 102.7 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 40. | **RUN:** 70. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 50.

Crawford has been a prolific hitter for average. His elite speed and contact ability are unquestioned, but his value hinges on lifting the ball more consistently and settling into a defensive home after his play in center field was heavily scrutinized. If the power comes, he profiles as an everyday regular.

76. JOSUE BRICEÑO
TIGERS, C/1B

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 106.7 mph.
HIT: 45. | **POW:** 65. | **RUN:** 30. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 55.

Briceño is a physical slugger with a good balance of plus-plus raw power and advanced contact skills. He still faces questions about his ability to stick behind the plate, which puts more pressure on his bat, but he could blossom into a 30-homer hitter if his offensive profile holds up against higher-level pitching.

77. ALFREDO DUNO
REDS, C

Age: 20. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.5 mph.
HIT: 40. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 45. | **ARM:** 50.

Duno pairs prodigious power with strong underlying plate skills. One of the most impressive hitters in the Florida State League in 2025, he hit .287/.430/.518 with 18 home runs while striking out less than 20% of the time. His large frame invites questions about his viability behind the plate in the long run.

78. JAXON WIGGINS
CUBS, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 97.1 mph.
FB: 70. | **CB:** 45. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 50. | **CTL:** 50.

A fireballing righthander with a 6-foot-6 frame, Wiggins enjoyed the best season of his career in 2025 and made a strong statement in his first full year back from Tommy John surgery. He's one of the hardest-throwing starters in the minors with big swing-and-miss stuff, though durability is a major question.

79. RHETT LOWDER
REDS, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB in 2024. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 92.5 mph (two-seam).
FB: 50. | **SL:** 65. | **CH:** 50. | **CTL:** 65.

A forearm strain followed by an oblique injury wiped out Lowder's 2025 season and kept him prospect-eligible for longer than expected. A polished pitchability righthander, he mixes four pitches with plus-plus command and should factor into the Reds' rotation picture in 2026.

80. ETHAN HOLLIDAY
ROCKIES, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.5 mph.
HIT: 45. | **POW:** 65. | **RUN:** 40. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 55.

Holliday was one of the most touted high school hitters in recent memory, but the No. 4 pick in 2025 fell flat on his face in his pro debut with a 39.3% strikeout rate in 18 games. Still, it's too early to write off the latest member of the Holliday family to turn pro. He has plus raw power and on-base skills.

81. BRANDON SPROAT
BREWERS, RHP

Age: 25. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 96.8 mph.
FB: 50. | **CB:** 55. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 60. | **CTL:** 50.

Sproat followed Mets prospects Nolan McLean and Jonah Tong to Queens late in the 2025 season. Now, he's a Brewers prospect after being a part of the Freddy Peralta trade. Sproat works with a robust six-pitch mix and has elite power across his arsenal. His ability to make adjustments lessens his reliever risk.

82. KENDRY CHOURIO
ROYALS, RHP

Age: 18. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
Average fastball velocity: 95.1 mph.
FB: 60. | **CB:** 55. | **CH:** 60. | **CTL:** 60.

Chourio authored a remarkable breakout in 2025 after signing out of Venezuela last January. He began his year in the Dominican Summer League and reached Low-A by the end of July. Chourio mixes a mid-90s fastball, a two-plane curveball and a changeup that kills lift.

83. A.J. EWING
METS, OF

Age: 21. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.2 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 40. | **RUN:** 65. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

A high school shortstop, Ewing has developed into a tooled-up center fielder who occasionally sees time at second base. Ewing stole 70 bases in 2025, the fifth-highest total in the minors, while hitting .315/.401/.429. He showed plus hitting ability, nearly double-plus speed and above-average defense.

84. JR RITCHIE
BRAVES, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 93.5 mph.
FB: 50. | **CB:** 50. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 50. | **CTL:** 50.

After missing large chunks of his previous two seasons to Tommy John surgery, Ritchie returned triumphantly in 2025. He logged 140 innings and spent most of the year at Triple-A. He attacks hitters with a seven-pitch mix and floods the zone, putting him on track for a big league debut in 2026.

85. CARSON WILLIAMS
RAYS, SS

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 107 mph.
HIT: 30. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 60. | **FLD:** 65. | **ARM:** 65.

Williams reached the majors in 2025, but he struggled to make contact. Still, his advanced defense and power remain intact, and he has hit at least 20 homers in each of his last three minor league seasons. He should compete for the Rays' everyday shortstop job entering 2026.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Ten players who just missed the Top 100

by JOSH NORRIS

Baseball America's Top 100 Prospects—the surest sign that spring is near—has arrived. From unanimous No. 1 Konnor Griffin to resurgent White Sox righthander Tanner McDougal, the first iteration of our signature ranking is ready to be discussed, dissected and digested.

Now, the question is: Who's next?

Once the MLB season gets going, players will start to graduate. Once that happens, players currently off the list will start to slide in. Here, in alphabetical order, are 10 players who could attain Top 100 status for the first time.

ETHAN CONRAD, OF, CUBS

Conrad hasn't taken an official professional at-bat, but the Wake Forest product's stock was on the rise before a shoulder brought his college career to an early end. The 17th overall pick does damage against righties and lefties alike and brings to the table an enviable blend of contact and impact. Conrad could quickly rise through the Cubs' ranks.

KEVIN DEFRANK, RHP, MARLINS

Defrank signed with Miami in January 2025 and immediately made his presence felt in the Dominican Summer League. There, as the leader of a pack of talented Miami pitchers, he blended physicality with athleticism into a package that overwhelmed the opposition. The only pitcher ranked higher in the DSL was Royals righty Kendry Chourio, who sliced his way to Low-A by season's end. Defrank adds depth to a Marlins system already flush with near-ready arm talent.

MICHAEL FORRET, RHP, RAYS

Forret was one of the four prospects Tampa Bay received from the Orioles in the trade that sent righty Shane Baz to Baltimore. A product of a Florida junior college, Forret blended a deep arsenal and solid strike-throwing capabilities into a breakout season. He posted a 1.58 ERA and 0.82 WHIP between High-A and Double-A in 2025 and punched out 91 hitters in 74 innings. Everything in his mix is either a 50 or a 60 on the scouting scale, including a curveball and sweeper that project as potential plus pitches.

DAVID HAGAMAN, RHP, D-BACKS

Like many of the prospects on this list, Hagaman was talented enough to merit inclusion in a trade. In his case, he moved from the Rangers to the D-backs in the Merrill Kelly deal. The righthander has a prototype starter's frame with the stuff to match. His fastball and curveball are potentially plus pitches, while his changeup and slider could be average or better. He throws strikes at a high clip and was impressive after moving to his new organization.

KANE KEPLEY, OF, CUBS

At North Carolina, Kepley earned a reputation as a pure hitter. As a pro, he backed it up. Kepley is light on power but high on contact, and he spent his first pro summer peppering line drives, drawing walks and stealing bases. He pairs a potentially plus hit tool with similarly graded speed and double-plus defense in center field. Put it all together, and you've got the makings of a classic leadoff hitter.

Kane Kepley

JOHNNY KING, LHP, BLUE JAYS

King announced his presence with authority in the early days of the Florida Complex League, where he was among the circuit's top pitching talents. After neutralizing FCL hitters for seven starts, King moved to full-season ball, where he drove heaps of empty swings but also learned that he would need to sharpen his control and command. Armed with a 60-grade fastball and curveball, King ran a strikeout rate of 39.5% in his first full season as a professional.

BENJAMIN RUSH/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (KEPLEY), BILL MITCHELL (HAGAMAN)

TYSON LEWIS, SS, REDS

When Lewis connects, good things happen. His 90th percentile exit velocity of 109.5 mph was the highest of any teenager with 100 or more plate appearances in 2025. His strong season extended to Low-A, where he blasted three more home runs. Lewis struck out 51 times at each of his two stops and will need to cut down his whiff rates as he moves up the ladder. If he can, he is primed rise quickly onto the Top 100.

BRADEN NETT, RHP, ATHLETICS

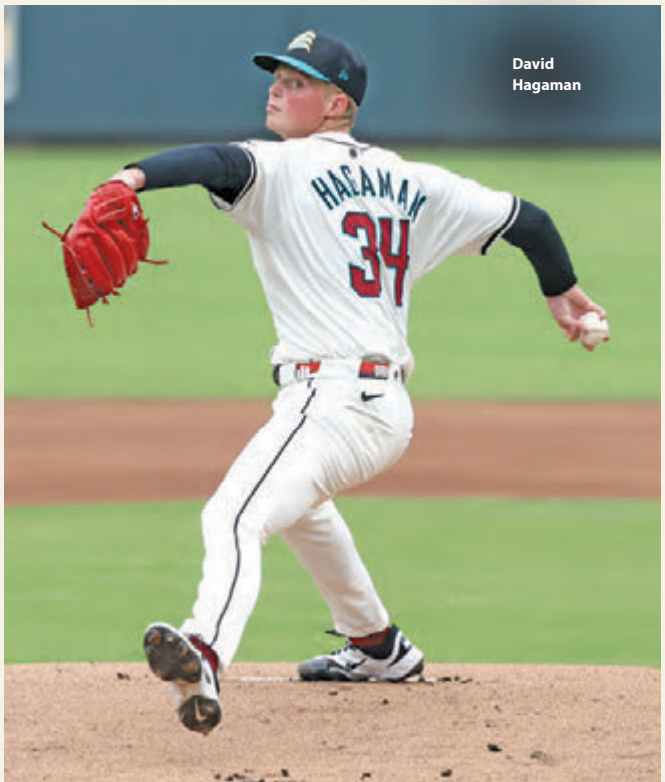
Nett signed with the Padres as an undrafted free agent in 2022 and capitalized on enough of his upside to become part of the package San Diego used to acquire closer Mason Miller. Nett works with six pitches, including a fastball and curveball that could reach plus and a sweeper and cutter with above-average ceilings as well. His athleticism and velocity give him a high ceiling, but he'll have to throw more strikes.

XAVIER NEYENS, SS, ASTROS

Neyens was part of a bounty of draft talent clustered in the Pacific Northwest in 2025. The Astros called his name with the 21st overall pick. As an amateur, Neyens showcased power that neared double-plus to go with a fringy hit tool. He is not likely to stick at shortstop, but his plus arm and power potential would serve him at third base.

KRUZ SCHOOLCRAFT, LHP, PADRES

The Padres love upside, and Schoolcraft has plenty. The 6-foot-8 lefty sports a fastball that lives in the mid 90s and has already bumped 99, and he pairs the pitch with a potentially above-average changeup. Schoolcraft's breaking ball will have to make significant strides, but he has the time and athleticism to develop that pitch as he moves up the ladder. A two-way player who also played first base, Schoolcraft showed huge power as an amateur on the days he didn't pitch.



David Hagaman

86. NATE GEORGE
ORIOLES, OF

Age: 20. **Peak:** High-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 102.9 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 70. | **FLD:** 70. | **ARM:** 50.

George put together a standout 2025 season, hitting .337/.413/.483 while climbing from Rookie ball to High-A. He's a speedy contact hitter, but his aggressive approach creates some questions about whether it will hold up at higher levels. There's no denying his speed or defensive value.

87. BO DAVIDSON
GIANTS, OF

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 105.6 mph.
HIT: 45. | **POW:** 60. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 55.

Davidson is the rare undrafted free agent who develops into a top prospect, and he continued to impress scouts in 2025 by hitting .281/.376/.468 with 18 home runs while finishing the year in Double-A. He blends fringe-average hitting ability with plus power, plus speed and above-average defense.

88. PARKER MESSICK
GUARDIANS, LHP

Age: 25. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 92.6 mph.
FB: 50. | **CB:** 45. | **SL:** 50. | **CH:** 55. | **CTL:** 55.

The barrel-chested lefty has outperformed his stuff dating back to his time at Florida State. Don't let his modest physical attributes fool you: Messick has advanced feel and impressed in his MLB debut in 2025, pitching to a 2.72 ERA with a minuscule 3.6% walk rate over seven starts.

89. BRAYLON DOUGHTY
GUARDIANS, RHP

Age: 20. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
Average fastball velocity: 93 mph.
FB: 55. | **CB:** 65. | **CH:** 50. | **CTL:** 60.

The 36th pick in 2024, Doughty had a phenomenal pro debut, making 22 starts at Low-A and striking out 27.3% of hitters. His plus control might be his greatest tool, as he posted a 6.4% walk rate and consistently attacked the strike zone. He has a unique mix of plus control, spin traits and remaining projection.

90. ETHAN SALAS
PADRES, C

Age: 20. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
90th percentile exit velocity: 101.7 mph.
HIT: 45. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 45. | **FLD:** 70. | **ARM:** 60.

Salas enters 2026 at just 19 years old, but injuries and ineffectiveness at the plate have taken some of the shine away since his precocious 2023 pro debut. While his bat has lagged, Salas' advanced defensive skills are still prominent and a healthy season could reignite some of his prospect spark.

91. HAGEN SMITH
WHITE SOX, LHP

Age: 22. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 93.4 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 45. | **CTL:** 40.

Smith starred at Arkansas and had the potential to move quickly in 2025, but his first pro season didn't unfold as planned. His velocity dipped and he struggled to throw strikes, so the White Sox shut him down to rework his mechanics. He returned to finish strong in the Arizona Fall League.

92. BILLY CARLSON
WHITE SOX, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Did not play. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: Did not play.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 70. | **ARM:** 70.

One of the top preps in the 2025 draft class, Carlson has a reputation as an elite defender. He's a double-plus shortstop with a 70-grade arm. While he has one half of the game figured out, Carlson will need to improve his hitting to develop into an above-average regular who competes for Gold Gloves.

93. CARLOS LAGRANGE
YANKEES, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 98.2 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 55. | **CH:** 40. | **CT:** 55. | **SW:** 60. | **CTL:** 45.

The massive 6-foot-7 righthander is one of the hardest-throwing starters in baseball. He sits 97-99 mph and touches 102 mph, while also throwing a plus sweeper and two other above-average breaking balls. Lagrange showed improved durability in 2025, making 24 appearances and logging 120 innings.

94. CONNOR PRIELIPP
TWINS, LHP

Age: 25. **Peak:** Triple-A. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 95 mph.
FB: 60. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 60. | **CTL:** 55.

Prielipp has teased front-end stuff dating back to his time at Alabama, but that promise has been offset by a murky injury history. His stuff remained intact in 2025 even while logging a career-high 82.2 innings. Added to the 40-man roster after the season, he's positioned to make his major league debut in 2026.

95. LUIS DE LEON
ORIOLES, LHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 95.7 mph (two-seam).
FB: 70. | **SL:** 60. | **CH:** 60. | **SP:** 55. | **CTL:** 45.

De Leon enjoyed a breakout in 2025, emerging as one of the hardest-throwing lefties in the minors. He works with a mid-90s sinker, a plus mid-80s slider as well as a changeup and splitter that both earn at least above-average grades from scouts, giving him a deep arsenal that misses bats.

96. LOGAN HENDERSON
BREWERS, RHP

Age: 24. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
Average fastball velocity: 93 mph.
FB: 50. | **SL:** 40. | **CH:** 60. | **CT:** 45. | **CTL:** 60.

Henderson might have graduated from this list in 2025 if not for injury. In five big league starts, the undersized righty struck out 33% of hitters while showing at least average command. His flat fastball approach angle, created by a low release height and a high rate of efficient spin, keeps hitters guessing.

97. KAYSON CUNNINGHAM
D-BACKS, SS

Age: 20. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2028.
90th percentile exit velocity: 97.7 mph.
HIT: 60. | **POW:** 45. | **RUN:** 55. | **FLD:** 50. | **ARM:** 50.

Cunningham combines plus contact skills, speed and remaining projection after going in the first round of the 2025 draft out of the Texas prep ranks. If everything clicks, he should develop into a dynamic leadoff threat with high on-base percentages, strike-zone control and above-average speed.

98. JHONNY LEVEL
GIANTS, SS

Age: 19. **Peak:** Low-A. **ETA:** 2029.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.5 mph.
HIT: 55. | **POW:** 55. | **RUN:** 45. | **FLD:** 55. | **ARM:** 60.

Level signed out of Venezuela in 2024 and impressed in his stateside debut a year later, hitting .269/.360/.436 across Rookie ball and Low-A. He's an advanced hitter with above-average plate skills, above-average power and a chance to stick at shortstop.

99. HARRY FORD
NATIONALS, C

Age: 23. **Peak:** MLB. **ETA:** 2026.
90th percentile exit velocity: 103.4 mph.
HIT: 50. | **POW:** 50. | **RUN:** 50. | **FLD:** 40. | **ARM:** 50.

Ford debuted with the Mariners in 2025 but struggled to make an impact in a brief look. He'll have much more opportunity with the Nationals, who acquired him in December and view him as their potential catcher of the future. Ford is an athletic but undersized catcher who has built his reputation on on-base skills.

100. TANNER McDOUGAL
WHITE SOX, RHP

Age: 23. **Peak:** Double-A. **ETA:** 2027.
Average fastball velocity: 97.5 mph.
FB: 65. | **CB:** 60. | **SL:** 50. | **CH:** 45. | **CTL:** 40.

McDougal authored one of the more unexpected breakouts of 2025. He went from a 6.04 ERA in 2024 to a 3.26 mark over 113.1 Double-A innings in 2025. He also struck out 28% of batters. McDougal sits 97-98 mph with advanced fastball command and a trio of secondaries that miss bats.

LOOKING AHEAD

Six players who could be the No. 1 prospect in 2027

A pair of 2024 first-round picks: Konnor Griffin (left) and Bryce Rainer in a Florida State League game.

While Pirates shortstop Konnor Griffin ranks as the No. 1 prospect for 2026, we feel confident that, barring an unexpected injury, he won't be eligible for a repeat honor next year.

Looking back through the history of Baseball America No. 1 prospects, we see that has been the case year after year. Wander Franco was the only repeat No. 1 of the past decade—and that was because his prospect status was preserved by the canceled 2020 season.

We expect that our top three prospects—Griffin, Kevin McGonigle and JJ Wetherholt—will graduate this season. Let's examine the top contenders to rank No. 1 on the Top 100 in 2027.

JESÚS MADE, SS, BREWERS

2026 Rank: No. 4

Made just reached Double-A Biloxi for five games at the end of 2025, and he can be expected to start there in 2026.

Made will play most of the season as a 19-year-old. He seems to be following a similar timetable to Jackson Chourio, who finished the 2022 season with six games at Biloxi. As a 19-year-old, Chourio spent almost all of 2023 in Double-A, receiving a late six-game promotion to Triple-A Nashville. He then made the Brewers' Opening Day roster in 2024.

That seems like a realistic, if aggressive, timetable for Made. With his well-rounded skill set, we expect him to be one of the best players in the minor leagues in 2026. If he just keeps doing what he's done so far, he would be the logical candidate to ascend to the No. 1 spot after the current top three graduate.

—J.J. Cooper

ROCH CHOLOWSKY, SS, UCLA

2026 Rank: NR

This year Cholowsky is a UCLA junior. If he were in pro ball instead, he would have a compelling case to be a top 10 overall prospect. Among pro shortstops, the list of players I would take before Cholowsky is minuscule: Griffin, McGonigle, Wetherholt and Made.

Cholowsky is a rare talent and a special draft prospect. He might not fit in the Bryce Harper or Stephen Strasburg tier, but he could wind up similar to Adley Rutschman coming out of Oregon State in 2019.

Cholowsky has few flaws to speak of. He's not an elite runner, but beyond that he could wind up with plus tools in the hit, power, field and arm categories. College baseball rarely sees shortstops of this caliber and with this sort of upside.

—Carlos Collazo

CALEB BONEMER, SS, WHITE SOX

2026 Rank: No. 27

At the plate, Bonemer checks a lot of boxes of a potential top prospect. His exit velocities compare favorably with Jesús Made's, and his zone-contact and chase rate are already better. If he can add more strength to boost his exit velocities and improve his overall contact rate, his overall data would look very similar to Kevin McGonigle's from 2025.

Bonemer projects for at least above-average hit and power, and there's a path for both of those to look more like plus tools in 2026—and maybe better.

Defense is the most important area for Bonemer to improve if he is going to push toward the No. 1 spot. Shortstops have ranked No. 1 in five of the last seven Top 100s, but right now, Bonemer isn't a lock to stay at the position.

—Ian Cundall

EDWARD FLORENTINO, OF, PIRATES

2026 Rank: No. 28

Florentino was one of the fastest risers in 2025. The 19-year-old corner outfielder ranked No. 3 in a Pirates system headlined by Griffin and Bubba Chandler. Florentino brings a lot to the table offensively, from bat-to-ball skills to a patient approach to legitimate plus power.

Florentino's 6-foot-4 frame has yet to fill out, so there may be even more impact potential yet to come. Add in that he appears to have a good head on his shoulders, and he seems like the kind of player who will continue to rise in our rankings.

—Daniel Malone

BRYCE RAINER, SS, TIGERS

2026 Rank: No. 29

Rainer teased us with his potential in 2025 before dislocating his shoulder. He hit .288/.383/.448 with five home runs and nine stolen bases in 35 games in the notoriously pitcher-friendly Florida State League.

The top reason Rainer could ascend to No. 1 next year is his ability to impact the ball. In this regard, he is similar to former No. 1 overall prospects Konnor Griffin and Roman Anthony, who also had elite 90th percentile exit velocities to go along with reasonable strikeout rates. Rainer recorded a 107.9 mph mark in 2025, similar to Anthony's 108.4 mark in 2024.

Rainer, while not a standout defender, is likely to stick on the left side of the infield, which should only boost his value.

—Geoff Pontes

JOSUAR GONZALEZ, SS, GIANTS

2026 Rank: No. 30

Gonzalez took the Dominican Summer League by storm in 2025, ranking as the circuit's No. 1 prospect and opening plenty of eyes in a brief U.S. look at instructional league.

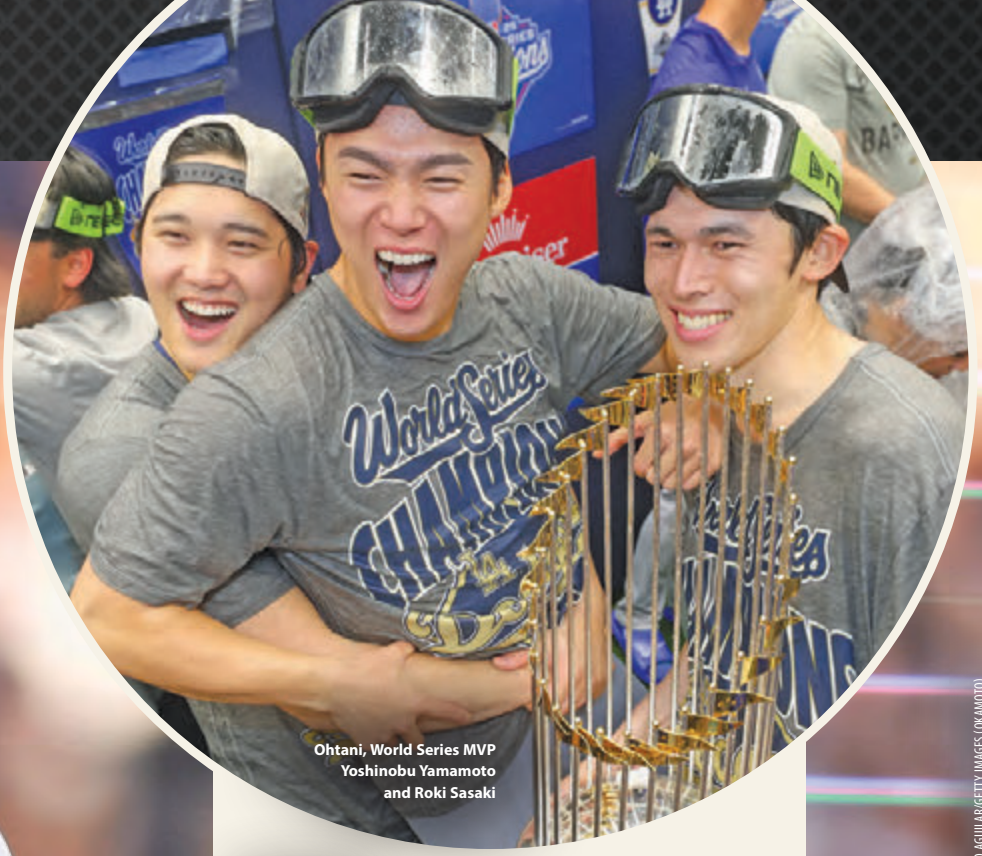
Gonzalez's dazzling defense gives him a strong chance at a long big league career, and he's shown flashes of the offensive potential that would make him a multi-time all-star. I

—Josh Norris

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

10 STORYLINES FOR 2026

Shohei Ohtani



Ohtani, World Series MVP Yoshinobu Yamamoto and Roki Sasaki

1 THE DODGERS GO FOR THREE IN A ROW

It took seven games, but the Dodgers won a second straight World Series in 2025 to make them back-to-back champions. No team had won consecutive World Series since the 1998 to 2000 Yankees. This year, the Dodgers will take aim at those same Yankees teams by trying to win three in a row. Los Angeles is once again the favorite to win it all after splurging on free agents Kyle Tucker and Edwin Diaz while bringing back a star-studded roster led by Shohei Ohtani, who also is chasing a third straight MVP award—and fifth in the last six seasons.

2 THE BLUE JAYS FLEX THEIR FINANCIAL MUSCLE

The Blue Jays blew a Game 7 lead to the Dodgers in the World Series and lost in 11 innings, but that didn't dampen the club's enthusiasm. Toronto outspent every team in free agency as it strives for its first championship since 1993. The Blue Jays spent a combined $337 million to sign righthander Dylan Cease, reliever Tyler Rogers, Japanese third baseman Kazuma Okamoto and 31-year-old righthander Cody Ponce, the reigning MVP in Korea. It's a key season in Toronto with George Springer, Kevin Gausman and Daulton Varsho all in the final years of their contracts.

Okamoto

NICOLE VASQUEZ/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (OHTANI), GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES (OHTANI, YAMAMOTO, SASAKI), JULIO AGUILAR/GETTY IMAGES (OKAMOTO)

3 CAN CENTRAL TEAMS END THEIR PENNANT DROUGHT?

The 2026 season marks the 10th anniversary of the Cubs-Indians World Series, the last time a Central division team won a pennant. In nine completed seasons since then, only East and West division teams have appeared in the World Series. Part of the Central shutout is due to the unusually dynastic run of the Dodgers (five pennants, three championships) and Astros (four pennants, two championships) over the past decade. The strongest Central challengers this year look like the Brewers, Cubs and Tigers. ***SEE MLB POWER RANKING ON PAGE 38.***

4 IS THE ASTROS DYNASTY OVER?

Last season, for the first time after eight consecutive October appearances, including seven straight trips to ALCS, Houston missed the playoffs. The 2025 club had a losing record in July, August and September and ultimately lost a tiebreaker to the Tigers for the final American League wild card. Now, after losing free agent Framber Valdez and with core players Jose Altuve, Josh Hader and Carlos Correa a year older, a rebound will be that much more difficult.

5 IN WITH THE NEW

This year's rookie class has a chance to be exceptional. Nine of the top 25 prospects have already reached the majors, including promising pitchers Nolan McLean, Trey Yesavage and Bubba Chandler and young hitters Carter Jensen, Samuel Basallo and Sal Stewart. The top three overall prospects—the Pirates' Konnor Griffin, the Tigers' Kevin McGonigle and the Cardinals' JJ Wetherholt—are shortstops with realistic paths to early debuts and significant playing time this year. We could look back at this crop of rookies as one of the best of the 21st century.
SEE TOP 20 ROOKIES ON PAGE 56.

Carter Jensen

6 THE FUTURE OF MEDIA RIGHTS

The steady transformation of media rights is being felt everywhere other than with the richest teams. The effects on many small- and mid-revenue teams is significant, because there's no scenario where local in-market media rights in a direct-to-consumer marketplace will come close to matching the passive income that teams raked in during the regional sports network heyday. Asking individual fans to pay $100 a year cannot compete with the old model, in which millions of non-sports watchers paid a couple of dollars to RSNs every month as part of their cable bills. Now, the long-term question is whether MLB can convert baseball as a whole to a more national media model, or if the massive revenue discrepancies between the largest and smallest markets will keep that from happening.

7 THE ABS CHALLENGE SYSTEM GETS CALLED UP

MLB has used the automated ball-strike system at Triple-A for years. Last year, it used ABS during spring training games, and it was a success. Now, teams, players and fans will see the ABS challenge system in use for the entire season. The impact of ABS on Triple-A pitchers has been dramatic—more strikeouts and more walks—and now we get to see how MLB pitchers, hitters and umpires adjust to it. Over time, teams will separate from the pack as they develop strategies to determine which batters and catchers may challenge a ball-strike call.

ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES

8 BALLPARK ALTERATIONS

The Athletics are back for season two in their Triple-A park in West Sacramento, where home games feature a 90-point increase in OPS compared with Oakland. But the other displaced American League team is headed home. The Rays played one season at the Yankees' spring training facility in Tampa but are returning to Tropicana Field this season, to the joy of Rays pitchers. The Trop had its roof blown off by Hurricane Milton in October 2024 but now has a new fiberglass dome and updated turf. Elsewhere in the AL, the Royals are moving in their fences at pitcher-friendly Kaufman Stadium by as many as 10 feet in left and right field, while the outfield wall is being shortened by as many as 18 inches.

9 THE GIANTS HIRE COLLEGE COACH TONY VITELLO

Giants president of baseball operations Buster Posey went off the board to hire a replacement manager for Bob Melvin. Posey signed University of Tennessee coach Tony Vitello to a three-year deal. Vitello guided the Volunteers to the program's first College World Series championship in 2024, when he was the BA College Coach of the Year. Still, he is the first college coach ever to move directly from an NCAA dugout to an MLB one. Obviously, guiding 20-year-old amateurs is different from multi-millionaire 30-year-olds, but the Giants view Vitello as up to the talk. As Jacob Rudner wrote about the hiring: "From the moment he arrived in Knoxville in the summer of 2017, Vitello began building Tennessee as if it were a major league organization disguised as a college program. His first step was assembling a staff fluent in analytics and data long before that became standard across the college game."

10 A LOCKOUT LOOMS

The 2026 season has no shortage of compelling storylines. Unfortunately, one of the most prominent ones centers on the Collective Bargaining Agreement that expires on Dec. 1 and the likelihood of a lockout. Reaching a new agreement between owners and players is going to be a challenge, not least of all because a segment of owners is expected to push hard for a salary cap. Such a system would help owners control costs and stabilize franchise values, but it's also a reaction to increased spending by the wealthiest teams. The gulf between the highest and lowest projected payrolls this season is $312 million. A decade ago, the difference between No. 1 and No. 30 was about $181 million. The top 10 payrolls this year are about $1.9 billion higher than the bottom 10. That same gap in 2016 was about $1 billion. No one knows for sure what will happen after the season, so be sure to enjoy the 2026 action.

Tony Vitello

BA CRYSTAL BALL

The BA editorial staff goes on record with our bold—and not so bold—predictions for the 2026 MLB season. Teams are listed with their BA Grade on the 20-80 scale.
Our 10 Crystal Ball prognosticators this year are Ben Badler, Jesús Cano, Mark Chiarelli, Carlos Collazo, J.J. Cooper, Ian Cundall, Matt Eddy, Josh Norris, Geoff Pontes and Jacob Rudner.

AL EAST		AL CENTRAL		AL WEST	
1. Blue Jays	70	**1.** Tigers	55	**1.** Mariners	60
2. Yankees*	60	**2.** Royals*	55	**2.** Athletics	50
3. Red Sox*	60	**3.** Guardians	45	**3.** Astros	50
4. Orioles	55	**4.** Twins	40	**4.** Rangers	50
5. Rays	40	**5.** White Sox	30	**5.** Angels	30

NL EAST		NL CENTRAL		NL WEST	
1. Mets	60	**1.** Brewers	55	**1.** Dodgers	80
2. Phillies*	60	**2.** Cubs*	55	**2.** Padres	55
3. Braves*	60	**3.** Reds	45	**3.** Giants	50
4. Marlins	40	**4.** Pirates	45	**4.** D-Backs	45
5. Nationals	20	**5.** Cardinals	40	**5.** Rockies	20

Wild Cards: Yankees, Red Sox, Royals
Pennant: Mariners (6), Blue Jays (3), Tigers (1)

Wild Cards: Phillies, Braves, Cubs
Pennant: Dodgers (7), Mets (2), Braves (1)

World Series Champion: Dodgers (5), Mariners (3), Blue Jays (2)

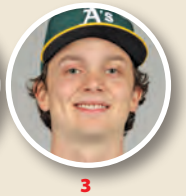
Three BA staffers think the Mets had the best offseason, with new acquisitions Luis Robert Jr. (left) and Devin Williams both tabbed as bounceback candidates

Biggest surprise team: Pirates (4), Athletics (2), Reds (2), Guardians (1), Royals (1)
Best offseason: Dodgers (3), Mets (3), Blue Jays (2), Cardinals (1), Orioles (1)
Most disappointing offseason: Giants (2), Braves (1), Padres (1), Phillies (1), Pirates (1), Red Sox (1), Rockies (1), Twins (1), Yankees (1)
Bounceback candidates: Devin Williams (2), Yordan Alvarez (1), Jac Caglianone (1), Shane McClanahan (1), Michael Harris II (1), Oneil Cruz (1), Sean Manaea (1), Luis Robert Jr. (1), Austin Riley (1)

AL MVP

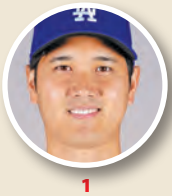
1 **Aaron Judge**
OF, Yankees

2 **Bobby Witt Jr.**
SS, Royals

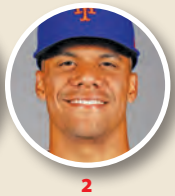


3 **Nick Kurtz**
1B, Athletics

NL MVP



1 **Shohei Ohtani**
DH/RHP, Dodgers

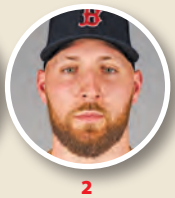


2 **Juan Soto**
OF, Mets

3 **Ronald Acuña Jr.**
OF, Braves

AL CY YOUNG AWARD

1 **Tarik Skubal**
LHP, Tigers

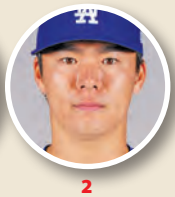


2 **Garrett Crochet**
LHP, Red Sox

3 **Hunter Brown**
RHP, Astros

NL CY YOUNG AWARD

1 **Paul Skenes**
RHP, Pirates



2 **Yoshinobu Yamamoto**
RHP, Dodgers

3 **Cristopher Sanchez**
LHP, Phillies

AL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1 **Trey Yesavage**
RHP, Blue Jays

2 **Carter Jensen**
C, Royals

3 **Kevin McGonigle**
SS, Tigers

NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1 **Konnor Griffin**
SS, Pirates

2 **JJ Wetherholt**
SS, Cardinals

3 **Nolan McLean**
RHP, Mets

ANDY KUNO/SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS/GETTY IMAGES (VITELLO)

POWER RANKING

Gone are the days when the American and National league were distinct entities. Today, with a 12-team MLB playoff field and balanced schedule, a club's overall standing is paramount. It's not solely about winning one's division—it's about being one of the 12 best teams when the regular season ends.

The BA Power Ranking presents for all 30 teams:

- A summary of offseason transactions, core players and key rookies.
- An overall BA Grade for each team on the 20-80 scouting scale. Consider teams at the same tier to be roughly equivalent in quality—at least in our eyes.
- Key hitters and pitchers, along with a BA Grade to express expected 2026 value. Key players are simply those projected to be in the primary lineup, in the rotation—including a sixth starter for depth—or top leverage relievers. The number beside select players signifies their ranking among the top 100 MLB players, as determined by BA.

Roster Resource was a primary source for hitting and pitching alignments.

Power ranking determined by BA editorial staff.

All text by Matt Eddy.

The Dodgers signed outfielder Kyle Tucker, the top 2026 free agent, to a four-year, $240 million contract.

MILESTONEWATCH

FREDDIE FREEMAN

3 HR FROM 400
69 H FROM 2,500

Just 29 players in history have combined 400 home runs with 2,500 hits, a club Freeman is poised to join this season.

LUKE HALES/GETTY IMAGES

#1 DODGERS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 80

What do you get for the team that has everything? How about the top free agent available and the top closer on the market? The Dodgers swooped in to sign **Kyle Tucker** and **Edwin Diaz** on high-dollar, short-term deals to add to their cavalcade of stars. **Shohei Ohtani** has won an MVP award in four of the past five seasons, while **Mookie Betts** and **Freddie Freeman** are ticketed for Cooperstown. The rotation also is flush with **Blake Snell**, **Yoshinobu Yamamoto** and **Tyler Glasnow**.

Player Development Wins: Will Smith is one of the best catchers in baseball. **Andy Pages** had a productive season as primary center fielder. **Emmet Sheehan** and **Roki Sasaki** are emerging starting pitchers.
Key Rookie: Alex Freeland could cover any infield spot but first base.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
DH	Shohei Ohtani #1	80
SS	Mookie Betts #28	65
RF	Kyle Tucker #22	65
1B	Freddie Freeman #90	55
C	Will Smith #41	60
3B	Max Muncy	50
LF	Teoscar Hernandez	50
CF	Andy Pages	55
2B	Hyeseong Kim	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Yoshinobu Yamamoto #34	65
SP	Blake Snell #37	65
SP	Tyler Glasnow	55
SP	Shohei Ohtani #1	60
SP	Emmet Sheehan	55
SP	Roki Sasaki	45
CL	Edwin Diaz #65	60
RP	Tanner Scott	50
RP	Alex Vesia	50

Ohtani, Yamamoto and Sasaki

RONALDO BOLAÑOS / LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES (TUCKER), DANIEL SHIREY/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (OHTANI, YAMAMOTO, SASAKI)

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #13

The front of the Dodgers' system is led by a quartet of high-upside outfielders with contrasting skill sets: **Eduardo Quintero**, **Josue De Paula**, **Zyhir Hope** and **Mike Sirota**. From there, a lot of the group's more intriguing prospects dealt with injuries in 2025. The system's pitching talent could use a boost, too. The end result is system that ranks outside the top 10 for the first time since 2014.

#2 BLUE JAYS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 70

Multiple times the Blue Jays came within one play of winning the 2025 World Series. To build a team capable of winning another AL pennant, they acted quickly in the offseason, signing starter **Dylan Cease**, reliever **Tyler Rogers** and foreign professional **Kazuma Okamoto** to play third base. **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.** and **Alejando Kirk** remain core players, though this is the final season under contract for **Kevin Gausman**, **George Springer** and **Daulton Varsho**.

Player Development Wins: Guerrero and Kirk persist as homegrown Blue Jays following the free agent departure of Bo Bichette.
Key Rookies: Righthander **Trey Yesavage** shined in the World Series and is an AL Rookie of the Year favorite. Okamoto is a veteran of 11 NPB seasons.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
DH	George Springer	50
RF	Addison Barger	50
1B	Vladimir Guerrero Jr. #12	75
CF	Daulton Varsho	50
C	Alejandro Kirk #35	65
LF	Jesus Sanchez	45
3B	Kazuma Okamoto	55
SS	Andres Gimenez	55
2B	Ernie Clement	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Kevin Gausman #94	55
SP	Dylan Cease #68	55
SP	Trey Yesavage	55
SP	Jose Berrios	50
SP	Cody Ponce	50
SP	Eric Lauer	40
CL	Jeff Hoffman	50
RP	Yimi Garcia	50
RP	Tyler Rogers	50

Guerrero

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #17

It was a banner season in 2025 for the Blue Jays' farm system, as their revamped pitching development helped in the emergence of a World Series standout in **Trey Yesavage**. The righthander leads a loaded top 10 group also headlined by first-round shortstops **Arjun Nimmala** and **JoJo Parker** and emerging lefty **Johnny King**, but a lack of depth in the 11-20 range drags the system down.

#3 MARINERS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

After pushing the Blue Jays to seven games in the ALCS, the Mariners bring back their roster core as they try to reach the franchise's first World Series. Seattle re-signed **Josh Naylor** and traded for **Brendan Donovan** and reliever **Jose Ferrer**. **Cal Raleigh** will be hard-pressed to repeat his MVP-caliber season but will power a lineup also featuring **Julio Rodriguez** and **Randy Arozarena**. The rotation returns all-stars **Bryan Woo**, **Logan Gilbert**, **Luis Castillo** and **George Kirby**.

Player Development Wins: The entire rotation is homegrown, aside from Castillo, while Raleigh and J-Rod are core players signed for the long term.
Key Rookies: A second-half power-up from shortstop **Colt Emerson** has him on the cusp. No. 3 overall pick **Kade Anderson** could cruise through the minors.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
3B	Brendan Donovan	55
C	Cal Raleigh #9	75
CF	Julio Rodriguez #8	75
1B	Josh Naylor	50
LF	Randy Arozarena	50
DH	Dominic Canzone	45
SS	J.P. Crawford	45
RF	Victor Robles	45
2B	Cole Young	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Bryan Woo #40	60
SP	Logan Gilbert #63	55
SP	Luis Castillo	50
SP	George Kirby #72	60
SP	Bryce Miller	50
SP	Emerson Hancock	40
CL	Andres Muñoz	55
RP	Matt Brash	50
RP	Jose Ferrer	50

Rodriguez

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #10

Similar to last year, the Mariners boast one of the league's most impressive top 10s, headlined by shortstop **Colt Emerson**, lefthander **Kade Anderson** and outfielder **Lazaro Montes**. Righthander **Ryan Sloan** and outfielders **Michael Arroyo** and **Jonny Farmelo** form a solid second tier, but the Mariners' talent level drops off sharply beyond the top 10.

MILESTONEWATCH

JOSE RAMIREZ
15 HR, 13 SB FROM 300/300

Jose Ramirez has three 30-30 seasons and will go 300-300 for his career this year, something just eight others have done.

JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

#4 METS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

A late fade cost them a wild card last season, so the Mets changed out their core. Gone are Pete Alonso, Edwin Diaz, Brandon Nimmo and Jeff McNeil. New this year are **Bo Bichette**, **Freddy Peralta**, **Luis Robert Jr.**, **Jorge Polanco**, **Marcus Semien**, **Devin Williams** and others. **Juan Soto** and **Francisco Lindor** lead a Mets lineup that will score runs. The question will be run prevention. Peralta and rookie **Nolan McLean** front a rotation full of No. 3 or 4 starter types.

Player Development Wins: Catcher **Francisco Alvarez** and third baseman **Brett Baty** should be lineup fixtures, as **David Peterson** will be in the rotation.
Key Rookies: McLean is a Rookie of the Year favorite, while 2024 first-round outfielder **Carson Benge** has a chance to contribute across the board.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Francisco Lindor #17	70
LF	Juan Soto #5	75
3B	Bo Bichette #30	65
1B	Jorge Polanco	50
2B	Marcus Semien	50
DH	Brett Baty	50
C	Francisco Alvarez	55
CF	Luis Robert Jr.	55
RF	Carson Benge	50

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Freddy Peralta #62	60
SP	Nolan McLean	55
SP	David Peterson	50
SP	Clay Holmes	50
SP	Sean Manaea	50
SP	Kodai Senga	45
CL	Devin Williams	55
RP	Luke Weaver	50
RP	Brooks Raley	45

Soto

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #7

The Mets stand out for the depth and diversity of their prospect stock, even after trading Jett Williams and Brandon Sproat for Freddy Peralta. **Nolan McLean** is the top pitching prospect, while New York also has top prospects at first base (**Ryan Clifford**), third base (**Jacob Reimer**) and center field (**Carson Benge** and **A.J. Ewing**). Their top eight prospects played at Double-A or higher.

#5 YANKEES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

Aside from a trade with the Marlins for promising lefthander **Ryan Weathers**, the Yankees largely maintain the status quo. They brought back **Cody Bellinger** and **Trent Grisham** to fill out a lineup headed by MVP **Aaron Judge** and also featuring **Jazz Chisholm Jr.**, **Austin Wells** and **Ben Rice**. **Max Fried** leads a rotation that will skew young early in the season before veterans **Carlos Rodon** and **Gerrit Cole** return. Sophomore **Cam Schlittler** appears poised to break through.

Player Development Wins: Wells, Rice and **Anthony Volpe** are lineup regulars, while Schlittler, **Will Warren** and 2024 AL Rookie of the Year **Luis Gil** are starters.
Key Rookies: Righthander **Elmer Rodriguez** and outfielder **Spencer Jones** both finished last season at Triple-A and could earn callups if they perform.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
CF	Trent Grisham	55
RF	Aaron Judge #2	80
LF	Cody Bellinger	55
1B	Ben Rice	55
DH	Giancarlo Stanton	50
2B	Jazz Chisholm Jr. #48	60
3B	Ryan McMahon	50
SS	Anthony Volpe	55
C	Austin Wells #78	55

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Max Fried #36	65
SP	Carlos Rodon	55
SP	Cam Schlittler	55
SP	Will Warren	45
SP	Ryan Weathers	45
SP	Gerrit Cole	55
CL	David Bednar	50
RP	Camilo Doval	50
RP	Fernando Cruz	45

Judge

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #23

After trading 16 prospects during the 2025 season, the Yankees' system is as fallow as it's been in years. Righthanders **Elmer Rodriguez** and **Carlos Lagrange** could see New York in 2026, while first-round shortstops **George Lombard Jr.**, who shined at the 2025 Futures Game, and **Dax Kilby** both have high upsides and impact potential.

VAUGHN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES (GUERRERO JR.), MITCHELL LEFF/GETTY IMAGES (SOTO), ISHIKA SAMANT/GETTY IMAGES (JUDGE), VAUGHN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES (RODRIGUEZ)

#6 PHILLIES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

The Phillies return one of the game's oldest lineups after re-signing **Kyle Schwarber** and **JT Realmuto** to team with **Bryce Harper** and **Trea Turner** and late-20s regulars **Alec Bohm**, **Brandon Marsh** and **Bryson Stott**. Even with **Zack Wheeler** recovering from thoracic outlet surgery and **Aaron Nola** coming off his worst season, Philadelphia has rotation depth. **Cristopher Sanchez** pitched like an ace last year, while **Jesus Luzardo** also received Cy Young Award votes.

Player Development Wins: The Phillies didn't originally sign Sanchez, but they developed him. Bohm and Stott are first-round picks turned solid regulars.
Key Rookies: The Phillies project to open the season with **Justin Crawford** in the outfield and **Andrew Painter** in the rotation. Both were first-round picks.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Trea Turner #52	60
DH	Kyle Schwarber #77	55
1B	Bryce Harper #39	60
3B	Alec Bohm	50
LF	Brandon Marsh	45
RF	Adolis Garcia	45
2B	Bryson Stott	55
C	J.T. Realmuto	50
CF	Justin Crawford	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Cristopher Sanchez #15	70
SP	Jesus Luzardo #57	60
SP	Aaron Nola	55
SP	Taijuan Walker	45
SP	Andrew Painter	45
SP	Zack Wheeler #61	60
CL	Jhoan Duran	55
RP	Jose Alvarado	50
RP	Brad Keller	50

Sanchez

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #20

Shortstop **Aidan Miller**, righthander **Andrew Painter** and outfielder **Justin Crawford** give the Phillies an enviable prospect trio, with all three first-rounders having the potential to debut this season and contribute. Elsewhere, trades have sapped the system of depth. The Phillies will need to hit big on their draft picks to move back up the ranks.

#7 BRAVES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

Injuries unraveled the Braves' season last year, when core players **Ronald Acuña Jr.**, **Austin Riley**, **Chris Sale**, **Spencer Schwellenbach** and **Spencer Strider** all spent time on the IL. Better health should yield better results as this group complements **Matt Olson**, **Michael Harris II** and NL Rookie of the Year **Drake Baldwin**. Atlanta re-signed closer **Raisel Iglesias** and supported him with **Robert Suarez**. The Braves imported shortstop **Ha-Seong Kim**, who will miss a chunk of the season after having wrist surgery, and outfielder **Mike Yastrzemski**.

Player Development Wins: So many Braves regulars are homegrown, from hitters Acuña, Riley, Harris and Baldwin to Schwellenbach and Strider in the rotation.
Key Rookie: Righthander **JR Ritchie** pitched well at Triple-A.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
RF	Ronald Acuña Jr. #11	75
1B	Matt Olson #75	55
DH	Jurickson Profar	50
C	Drake Baldwin #100	55
3B	Austin Riley #25	65
LF	Mike Yastrzemski	45
2B	Ozzie Albies	50
CF	Michael Harris II #44	60
SS	Mauricio Dubon	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Chris Sale #42	60
SP	Spencer Strider	55
SP	Reynaldo Lopez	50
SP	Grant Holmes	45
SP	Bryce Elder	40
RP	Joey Wentz	40
CL	Raisel Iglesias	55
RP	Robert Suarez	50
RP	Dylan Lee	45

Riley

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #26

The Braves targeted bats in the draft for the first time in years, drafting **Tate Southisene**, **Alex Lodise** and **Cody Miller**, but the system's strengths continue to revolve around the pitching depth with lots of uncertainty in the hitting ranks. First-round lefty **Cam Caminiti** leads the Atlanta mound hopefuls, while righty **JR Ritchie** looked sharp in his first full year back from Tommy John surgery.

MILESTONEWATCH

SHOHEI OHTANI

20 HR FROM 300
35 SB FROM 200

Shohei Ohtani is set to clear 300 homers and 200 steals in his ninth MLB season. No other player has done it as quickly.

RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES)

Acuña

#8 RED SOX

OVERALL BA GRADE: 60

A full season from young star **Roman Anthony** will go a long way, and adding a righthanded bat in **Willson Contreras** will help mitigate the loss of Alex Bregman, but this is a Red Sox roster that projects to rely on its pitching. Boston signed **Ranger Suarez** to a five-year deal and traded for **Sonny Gray** to complement ace **Garrett Crochet**. **Ceddanne Rafaela** is an all-world defensive center fielder, while corner outfielders **Jarren Duran** and **Wilyer Abreu** are lineup focal points.

Player Development Wins: Anthony could be a perennial all-star. Duran is a seventh-round win. Second-year **Marcelo Mayer** will get some run this year.
Key Rookies: The Red Sox have a number of promising young arms in reserve, highlighted by No. 1 prospect **Payton Tolle** and fellow lefthander **Connelly Early**.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
LF	Roman Anthony #91	55
SS	Trevor Story	50
DH	Jarren Duran	55
1B	Willson Contreras	50
RF	Wilyer Abreu	50
C	Carlos Narvaez	50
2B	Caleb Durbin	45
3B	Marcelo Mayer	45
CF	Ceddanne Rafaela	55

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Garrett Crochet #10	75
SP	Ranger Suarez #64	60
SP	Sonny Gray #56	60
SP	Brayan Bello	50
SP	Johan Oviedo	45
SP	Connelly Early	50
CL	Aroldis Chapman	55
RP	Garrett Whitlock	50
RP	Justin Slaten	45

Crochet

EDWARD M. PIO RODA/GETTY IMAGES (RILEY). BRANDON SLOTER/GETTY IMAGES (ACUNA JR.). AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES (CROCHET). EMILEE CHINN/GETTY IMAGES (SANCHEZ)

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #15

Once a system dominated by high-end hitting talent, the Red Sox have seen things flip completely. Now, seven of their top 10 prospects are pitchers. Boston has enviable proximity pitching depth, led by **Payton Tolle**, **Connelly Early**, **Jake Bennett** and 2025 first-rounder **Kyson Witherspoon**, but their position player prospects after **Franklin Arias** face a lot of questions.

#9 BREWERS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

The Brewers had a typical Brewers offseason. They signed no marquee free agents. They traded an all-star in the final year of his contract (Freddy Peralta) for prospects. They made smaller trades to add depth. Through it all, Milwaukee has a strong core led by **William Contreras**, **Jackson Chourio**, **Brice Turang** in the line-up and **Brandon Woodruff**, **Quinn Priester** and second-year **Jacob Misiorowski** in the rotation. The club's overall pitching depth sets it apart.

Player Development Wins: Players such as Chourio, Turang, Woodruff, Misiorowski and **Sal Frelick** represent the best of Brewers development.
Key Rookies: Righthander **Logan Henderson** pitched well last year prior to an elbow injury. **Brandon Sproat** and **Jett Williams** arrived in the Peralta trade.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
LF	Jackson Chourio #87	55
2B	Brice Turang #96	55
C	William Contreras #27	65
DH	Christian Yelich	50
1B	Andrew Vaughn	45
RF	Sal Frelick	50
3B	Luis Rengifo	45
CF	Garrett Mitchell	45
SS	Joey Ortiz	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Brandon Woodruff	50
SP	Jacob Misiorowski	55
SP	Quinn Priester	50
SP	Chad Patrick	45
SP	Logan Henderson	50
SP	Brandon Sproat	45
CL	Abner Uribe	50
RP	Trevor Megill	50
RP	Jared Koenig	45

Chourio

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #3

The 2025 Organization of the Year, the Brewers are among the best in the game throughout all facets of scouting and player development. Four of their top 10 prospects—**Jesus Made**, **Luis Peña**, **Luis Lara** and **Jeferson Quero**—are home-grown international signings. Pair that group with their ability to find late-round gems and you get a system with both impact talent at the top and depth.

#10 CUBS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

The Cubs are outspending all their division rivals by at least $100 million, which affords them greater depth of proven MLB players. Chicago enhanced its upside by signing **Alex Bregman** for five years and trading for **Edward Cabrera**. Most of the other key players return from last year, including a Gold Glove up-the-middle alignment of **Pete Crow-Armstrong**, **Dansby Swanson** and **Nico Hoerner**. **Michael Busch**, **Ian Happ** and **Seiya Suzuki** provide bang for the buck. NL Rookie of the Year runner-up **Cade Horton** could take a step forward.

Player Development Wins: Happ, Hoerner and Horton are all Cubs first-round picks. They traded for PCA early in his pro career and brought him along.
Key Rookie: Hitting savant **Moises Ballesteros** has a projected role.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
1B	Michael Busch	50
3B	Alex Bregman #82	55
LF	Ian Happ	50
RF	Seiya Suzuki	55
CF	Pete Crow-Armstrong #20	65
2B	Nico Hoerner #85	55
SS	Dansby Swanson #59	60
DH	Moises Ballesteros	45
C	Carson Kelly	45

KEY PITCHERS

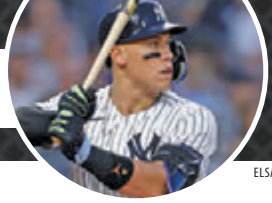
Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Matthew Boyd	50
SP	Edward Cabrera	55
SP	Cade Horton	50
SP	Shota Imanaga	50
SP	Jameson Taillon	45
SP	Justin Steele	50
CL	Daniel Palencia	50
RP	Phil Maton	45
RP	Hunter Harvey	45

Crow-Armstrong

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #22

The Cubs have boasted a strong top of the system for the past several seasons, with catcher **Moises Ballesteros** and righthander **Jaxon Wiggins** ranking as Top 100 Prospects this year, while outfielder **Owen Caissie** was used to trade for Edward Cabrera. However, the Cubs' system shallows out after the top and has a real lack of impact pitching.

MILESTONEWATCH



ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

AARON JUDGE
32 HR FROM 400

With a typical season, Aaron Judge will hit his 400th career home run, which would make him the fastest ever to 400.

#11 ORIOLES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

After early playoff exits in 2023 and 2024 followed by an everything-went-wrong, 87-loss season in 2025, Baltimore spent money to round out its roster. Orioles draftees **Gunnar Henderson**, **Adley Rutschman**, **Jordan Westburg** and **Jackson Holliday** remain core players, but now **Pete Alonso** and **Taylor Ward** offer a power-and-presence boost. The rotation needed the most help, and it got it via a trade for **Shane Baz** and signings of **Chris Bassitt** and **Zach Eflin**. **Kyle Bradish** and **Trevor Rogers** are on board for full seasons.

Player Development Wins: Henderson, Rutschman, Westburg, Holliday and **Colton Cowser** are all premium Orioles draft picks.
Key Rookies: Catcher **Samuel Basallo** and outfielder **Dylan Beavers** are next.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
2B	Jackson Holliday #86	50
3B	Jordan Westburg	55
SS	Gunnar Henderson #7	75
1B	Pete Alonso #81	55
C	Adley Rutschman #55	60
LF	Taylor Ward	50
RF	Dylan Beavers	45
CF	Colton Cowser	55
DH	Samuel Basallo	50

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Trevor Rogers	55
SP	Kyle Bradish #95	55
SP	Chris Bassitt	50
SP	Shane Baz	55
SP	Zach Eflin	45
SP	Dean Kremer	45
CL	Ryan Helsley	50
RP	Andrew Kittredge	50
RP	Keegan Akin	45

Henderson

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #11

The Orioles had the largest bonus pool in the 2025 draft and then sent two of their high-bonus draftees—**Slater de Brun** and **Caden Bodine**—to the Rays to acquire Shane Baz. While that dropped them five spots from their December farm ranking, the Orioles still have five Top 100 Prospects, including 2026 rookies **Samuel Basallo**, **Dylan Beavers** and potentially righthander **Trey Gibson**.

#12 TIGERS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

The Tigers made a late run to the 2024 postseason and survived a 2025 collapse to qualify. This year they have the horses to win in a more traditional manner. Ace **Tarik Skubal** is back for a possible final season in Detroit, now supported by **Framber Valdez** and the return of **Justin Verlander**. Detroit solidified its bullpen by signing **Kenley Jansen** and re-signing **Kyle Finnegan**. Run production does not project as rosily, but the Tigers have enough firepower with **Riley Greene**, **Gleyber Torres**, **Spencer Torkelson**, **Colt Keith** and **Kerry Carpenter** to win the division.

Player Development Wins: Greene, Torkelson, Keith, Carpenter, **Dillon Dingler** and **Parker Meadows** are homegrown, as are starers Skubal and **Casey Mize**.
Key Rookie: Shortstop **Kevin McGonigle** is the ultimate X-factor in the AL race.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
3B	Colt Keith	50
2B	Gleyber Torres	55
DH	Kerry Carpenter	50
LF	Riley Greene #49	60
1B	Spencer Torkelson	50
RF	Wenceel Perez	45
SS	Zach McKinstry	45
C	Dillon Dingler	55
CF	Parker Meadows	50

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Tarik Skubal #4	80
SP	Framber Valdez #43	60
SP	Jack Flaherty	55
SP	Justin Verlander	50
SP	Casey Mize	50
SP	Troy Melton	45
RP	Kenley Jansen	55
RP	Will Vest	50
RP	Kyle Finnegan	50

Skubal

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #4

Few organizations can come close to matching the top-end prospect talent the Tigers have, led by shortstops **Kevin McGonigle** and **Bryce Rainer** and center fielder **Max Clark**. First baseman/catcher **Josue Briceño** could be a bopper. Detroit's system drops off pretty quickly after the top tier, but the recent investments in high-ceiling pitchers could pay off in 2027 and beyond.

MATT DIRKSEN/CHICAGO CUBS/GETTY IMAGES (CROW-ARMSTRONG), PATRICK MCDERMOTT/GETTY IMAGES (CHOURIO), SCOTT MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES (HENDERSON), EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES (SKUBAL)

#13 ROYALS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

The Royals' top-tier talent is good enough to claim a playoff spot. It will be up to the supporting cast, and possibly two young hitters who could step forward. **Bobby Witt Jr.** is an MVP candidate. A healthy season from **Cole Ragans** could result in Cy Young Award votes. The Royals developed **Maikel Garcia**, **Kris Bubic**, **Vinnie Pasquantino** and **Noah Cameron** into their best selves. The X-factor for Kansas City is the performance of second-year slugger **Jac Caglianone** and rookie catcher **Carter Jensen**. Breakthroughs from them would lengthen the lineup.

Player Development Wins: Examples include Witt, Garcia, Bubic, Pasquantino, Cameron and 35-year-old, nine-time all-star catcher **Salvador Perez**.
Key Rookie: Jensen could be a top-hitting young catcher.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
3B	Maikel Garcia #71	55
SS	Bobby Witt Jr. #3	80
1B	Vinnie Pasquantino	50
C	Salvador Perez	50
RF	Jac Caglianone	50
2B	Jonathan India	50
DH	Carter Jensen	50
LF	Isaac Collins	45
CF	Kyle Isbel	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Cole Ragans #50	60
SP	Michael Wacha	45
SP	Kris Bubic	50
SP	Seth Lugo	50
SP	Noah Cameron	50
SP	Stephen Kolek	40
CL	Carlos Estevez	50
RP	Lucas Erceg	50
RP	Matt Strahm	50

Witt

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #21

Carter Jensen's breakout last year gives the Royals another potential long-term regular to go with Bobby Witt Jr. and Maikel Garcia, but the team's misses on three straight top 10 draft picks—**Asa Lacy**, **Frank Mozzicato** and **Gavin Cross** from 2020 to 2022—have left a lasting mark. The early returns on 2024 first-rounder Jac Caglianone are much better. He has already graduated.

Tatis

MILESTONEWATCH

KENLEY JANSEN
24 SAVES FROM 500

Kenley Jansen would join Mariano Rivera and Trevor Hoffman as the only closers ever to reach 500 saves.

GEOFF STELLFOX/GETTY IMAGES

#14 PADRES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 55

Player movement was the name of the game in San Diego, as it is most seasons and offseasons under president of baseball operations **AJ Preller**. Gone are Dylan Cease, Luis Arraez and Robert Suarez. In are **Nick Castellanos**, **German Marquez**, **Miguel Andujar** and KBO infielder **Sung-Mun Song**. **Michael King** re-signed as the club's top starter, and **Joe Musgrove** returns from Tommy John surgery to join **Nick Pivetta** to give San Diego a solid top three in front of a lockdown bullpen. **Fernando Tatis Jr.**, **Jackson Merrill** and **Manny Machado** are back to drive the offense.

Player Development Wins: Merrill is the only truly homegrown Padre.
Key Rookie: Song played third and second base in Korea and provides utility.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
RF	Fernando Tatis Jr. #14	70
CF	Jackson Merrill #38	60
3B	Manny Machado #58	60
LF	Ramon Laureano	50
1B	Gavin Sheets	45
SS	Xander Bogaerts #93	55
2B	Jake Cronenworth	50
DH	Miguel Andujar	45
C	Freddy Fermin	50

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Michael King	55
SP	Nick Pivetta #98	55
SP	Joe Musgrove	55
SP	Randy Vasquez	45
SP	German Marquez	45
SP	JP Sears	45
CL	Mason Miller #66	60
RP	Adrian Morejon	50
RP	Jeremiah Estrada	50

Merrill

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #29

The Padres' system would rank in a more prominent spot had they not dealt a slew of top 30 prospects—headlined by shortstop Leo De Vries—at the 2025 trade deadline. Still just 19, catcher **Ethan Salas** has reclaimed the top spot in the system followed by first-round lefthanders **Kruz Schoolcraft** and **Kash Mayfield**. But at the moment, this is a system that lacks depth and high-end talent.

#15 ATHLETICS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 50

The Athletics played .547 ball in the second half but could not overcome a 3-24 skid in May and June. The club's lineup projects well, with the likes of reigning Rookie of the Year **Nick Kurtz**, **Jacob Wilson**, **Shea Langeliers**, **Brent Rooker**, **Lawrence Butler** and **Tyler Soderstrom**. Pitching was the problem last year and projects to be in shorter supply beyond **Luis Severino** and **Jeffrey Springs**. Imports **Jeff McNeil**, **Aaron Civale** and **Andy Ibañez** add veteran help.

Player Development Wins: Three of the Athletics' first-round picks this decade—Soderstrom, Wilson, Kurtz—are impact regulars. Butler, sophomore righty **Luis Morales** and Gold Glove-caliber center fielder **Denzel Clarke** are homegrown.
Key Rookies: Lefthanders **Jamie Arnold** and **Gage Jump** could jump to MLB.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
1B	Nick Kurtz #51	60
C	Shea Langeliers #79	60
LF	Tyler Soderstrom #99	55
DH	Brent Rooker	55
2B	Jeff McNeil	50
SS	Jacob Wilson #67	55
RF	Lawrence Butler	50
3B	Max Muncy	40
CF	Denzel Clarke	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Luis Severino	50
SP	Jeffrey Springs	45
SP	Aaron Civale	45
SP	Jacob Lopez	45
SP	Luis Morales	45
SP	J.T. Ginn	45
CL	Justin Sterner	45
RP	Hogan Harris	40
RP	Mark Leiter Jr.	45

Kurtz

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #9

Nick Kurtz and **Jacob Wilson** have already graduated from talented prospects to excellent big leaguers, but there's more behind them. Lefthanders **Gage Jump** and **Jamie Arnold** could reach MLB this year, and the organization landed shortstop **Leo De Vries** and righthander **Braden Nett**, among others, from the Padres at the 2025 trade deadline for closer Mason Miller.

SEAN M. HAFFEY/GETTY IMAGES (TATIS JR.), MEGAN BRIGGS/GETTY IMAGES (MERRILL), MARY DECICCO/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (WITT JR.), G FIUME/GETTY IMAGES (KURTZ)

#16 ASTROS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 50

After eight straight postseason appearances, the Astros sat out October last season. Pitching injuries and a lost year from **Yordan Alvarez** were too much to overcome, even as **Hunter Brown** finished third in Cy Young Award voting and **Jeremy Peña** made the all-star team. The Astros signed star Japanese righthander **Tatsuya Imai** and traded for **Mike Burrows** to support Brown. The lineup skews old and could be prohibitive, unless **Carlos Correa**, **Jose Altuve** and **Christian Walker** have more magic in their bats.

Player Development Wins: Brown and Peña are major assets. Altuve has built a Hall of Fame résumé. **Jake Meyers** and **Cristian Javier** have provided value.
Key Rookies: Imai is obvious, while **Brice Matthews** could see infield reps.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Jeremy Peña #46	60
LF	Yordan Alvarez #16	70
2B	Jose Altuve	50
3B	Carlos Correa #70	55
DH	Isaac Paredes	50
1B	Christian Walker	50
C	Yainer Diaz	55
RF	Cam Smith	50
CF	Jake Meyers	50

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Hunter Brown #31	65
SP	Cristian Javier	45
SP	Tatsuya Imai	50
SP	Lance McCullers Jr.	45
SP	Mike Burrows	50
SP	Ryan Weiss	45
CL	Josh Hader	55
RP	Bryan Abreu	50
RP	Bryan King	45

Alvarez

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #27

For the better part of the last decade, the Astros' system has ranked among the worst in the game. Yet, Houston has a good number of higher-upside players to give it a risk/reward element. Houston boasts three high-upside teenagers in 2025 first-rounder **Xavier Neyens**, outfielder **Kevin Alvarez** and Dominican shortstop **Albert Fermin**, a 2026 signee.

#17 GIANTS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 50

The Giants signed free agents around the margins in the offseason, including **Harrison Bader**, **Luis Arraez**, **Tyler Mahle** and **Adrian Houser**, but San Francisco made the biggest headlines by hiring University of Tennessee coach **Tony Vitello** as manager. No coach had ever gone from an NCAA dugout directly to an MLB one. The Giants have talented players all over the field—**Rafael Devers**, **Willy Adames** and **Matt Chapman** in the lineup; **Logan Webb** and **Robbie Ray** on the mound—putting them squarely in the NL wild card picture.

Player Development Wins: Drafted in the fourth round in 2014, Webb is a workhorse. First-round picks **Heliot Ramos** and **Patrick Bailey** are regulars.
Key Rookie: Six-foot-7 first baseman **Bryce Eldridge** has mammoth power.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
2B	Luis Arraez	50
1B	Rafael Devers #60	60
SS	Willy Adames #53	60
3B	Matt Chapman #73	55
RF	Jung Hoo Lee	55
LF	Heliot Ramos	50
CF	Harrison Bader	45
DH	Bryce Eldridge	50
C	Patrick Bailey	55

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Logan Webb #24	65
SP	Robbie Ray	55
SP	Tyler Mahle	50
SP	Adrian Houser	45
SP	Landen Roupp	45
SP	Hayden Birdsong	45
CL	Ryan Walker	50
RP	Erik Miller	40
RP	Joel Peguero	40

Webb

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #14

This system is in its best shape in years. Beyond slugging first baseman **Bryce Eldridge**, the Giants' prospect group has benefited from a bumper crop of young talent, including firecracker Dominican shortstop **Josuar Gonzalez**. There's depth and upside in spades, as typified by outfielder **Bo Davidson**, shortstop **Jhonny Level** and lefthander **Jacob Bresnahan**.

MILESTONEWATCH

HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

MANNY MACHADO
31 HR FROM 400

Mike Schmidt, Eddie Mathews, Adrian Beltre and Chipper Jones are the only third basemen with 400 home runs.

#18 RANGERS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 50

The Rangers hung around the AL wild card race late into last season, but they have a different look this season. It starts in the dugout, where **Skip Schumaker** replaces 2023 World Series-winning manager Bruce Bochy. Texas bid adieu to members of that team—Marcus Semien, Adolis Garcia, Jonah Heim—while swinging trades for **MacKenzie Gore** and **Brandon Nimmo** and signing **Danny Jansen**. **Corey Seager** remains the lineup anchor. Gore joins a rotation that could be sneaky good with **Jacob deGrom** and **Nathan Eovaldi** leading the pack.

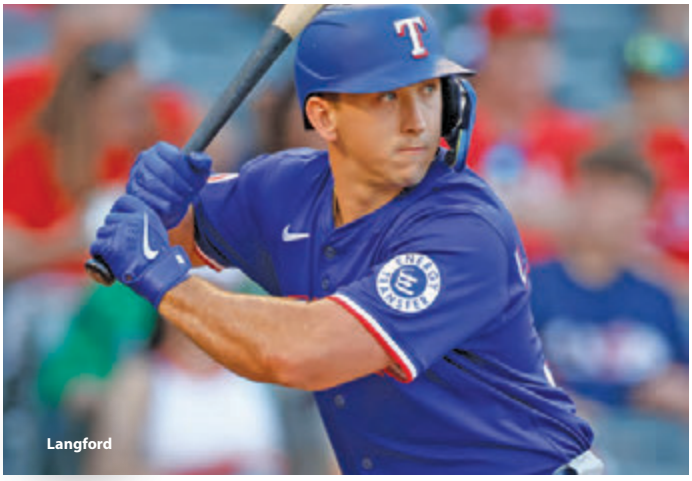
Player Development Wins: Wyatt Langford looks to take another step forward, while **Josh Jung** (rookie form) and **Evan Carter** (health) strive for their best selves.
Key Rookie: Righthander **Jose Corniell** has a chance to log big league innings.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
RF	Brandon Nimmo	50
LF	Wyatt Langford #33	65
SS	Corey Seager #21	65
DH	Joc Pederson	45
1B	Jake Burger	50
CF	Evan Carter	50
C	Danny Jansen	45
3B	Josh Jung	50
2B	Josh Smith	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Jacob deGrom #54	60
SP	Nathan Eovaldi #76	55
SP	MacKenzie Gore	55
SP	Jack Leiter	50
SP	Jacob Latz	45
SP	Kumar Rocker	45
CL	Robert Garcia	50
RP	Chris Martin	45
RP	Cole Winn	40



Langford

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #24

Bahamian shortstop **Sebastian Walcott** is one of the game's elite talents, but he's out for 2026 after having elbow surgery. Righthander **Caden Scarborough** was one of the game's bigger breakouts in 2025. Otherwise, the system needs major rebounds from its proximity prospects—including top 2024 picks **Malcolm Moore** and **Dylan Dreiling**—to supplement the big league roster.

#19 REDS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 45

Aside from potential franchise player **Elly De La Cruz**, the Reds' offense lacks firepower, though free agents **Eugenio Suarez** and **JJ Bleday** will help amplify the lineup. Steps forward from **Noelvi Marte**, **Matt McLain** and rookie **Sal Stewart** would go a long way. What the lineup lacks, the rotation delivers. Reds draft picks **Hunter Greene**, **Andrew Abbott**, **Nick Lodolo** and **Chase Burns** do the job in different ways. **Brady Singer** rounds out a potential top-five rotation.

Player Development Wins: The Reds are on a roll with pitcher IDs in the draft, with 2023 first-rounder **Rhett Lowder** on deck. Cincinnati also originally signed lineup regulars De La Cruz, McLain, Stewart, **Tyler Stephenson** and **TJ Friedl**.
Key Rookie: Stewart batted cleanup for Cincinnati in the playoffs.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
CF	TJ Friedl	45
RF	Noelvi Marte	50
SS	Elly De La Cruz #13	70
DH	Eugenio Suarez	50
1B	Sal Stewart	50
C	Tyler Stephenson	50
LF	JJ Bleday	45
2B	Matt McLain	45
3B	Ke'Bryan Hayes	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Hunter Greene #29	65
SP	Andrew Abbott	55
SP	Brady Singer	55
SP	Nick Lodolo	55
SP	Chase Burns #80	55
SP	Rhett Lowder	50
CL	Emilio Pagan	50
RP	Tony Santillan	45
RP	Graham Ashcraft	50

De La Cruz

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #19

Chase Burns' graduation dinged the Reds' ranking, but the organization has several prospects ready to help in the big leagues. First baseman **Sal Stewart** should fit right into the middle of the Reds' lineup, and righthander **Rhett Lowder** is back to fit into the rotation at some point. Keep an eye on shortstop **Tyson Lewis**, who could make a big jump up the ranking in 2026.

LACHLAN CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES (WEBB), BRANDON SLOTER/GETTY IMAGES (LANGFORD), KENNETH RICHMOND/GETTY IMAGES (ALVAREZ), GEOFF STELLFOX/GETTY IMAGES (DE LA CRUZ)

#20 GUARDIANS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 45

The Guardians went 20-7 last September to overtake the Tigers and win their second straight AL Central title. The Guardians will again have one of the lowest payrolls and could again exceed expectations. The roster is so young, aside from superstar **Jose Ramirez** and leadoff man **Steven Kwan**, that it doesn't necessarily project well, but players such as **Kyle Manzardo**, **Bo Naylor**, **Brayan Rocchio** and rookie **Chase DeLauter** have prospect pedigree. A strong bullpen and quality rotation, headed by **Gavin Williams** and **Tanner Bibee**, keep Cleveland competitive.

Player Development Wins: Ramirez, Kwan, Naylor, Rocchio, DeLauter and **CJ Kayfus** are homegrown, as are Williams, Bibee and **Logan Allen** in the rotation.
Key Rookies: Recent first-rounders DeLauter and **Travis Bazzana** are most likely.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
LF	Steven Kwan	55
RF	George Valera	45
3B	Jose Ramirez #19	65
1B	Kyle Manzardo	50
CF	Chase DeLauter	50
2B	Gabriel Arias	45
DH	C.J. Kayfus	45
C	Bo Naylor	50
SS	Brayan Rocchio	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Gavin Williams	55
SP	Tanner Bibee	55
SP	Slade Cecconi	50
SP	Logan Allen	45
SP	Joey Cantillo	45
SP	Parker Messick	45
CL	Cade Smith	50
RP	Hunter Gaddis	50
RP	Shawn Armstrong	50

Ramirez

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #6

The Guardians' farm system is one of the deepest in the game, with a litany of hitting and pitching prospects and success stories from both the amateur and international markets. Heading up the ranking are the organization's first-round picks form the past three drafts: outfielder **Chase DeLauter**, first baseman **Ralphy Velazquez** and second baseman **Travis Bazzana**.

#21 PIRATES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 45

The Pirates have scored fewer runs than any team in the 2020s, making it difficult to gauge how good veterans **Bryan Reynolds** and **Oneil Cruz** truly are, absent any sort of lineup support. That might change in 2026 after Pittsburgh added actual major league hitters in **Brandon Lowe**, **Ryan O'Hearn** and **Marcell Ozuna**. The Pirates acquired those players at cost to their team defense, so it will be a balancing act with a talented young rotation headlined by Cy Young Award winner **Paul Skenes** along with **Mitch Keller**, **Braxton Ashcraft** and rookie **Bubba Chandler**.

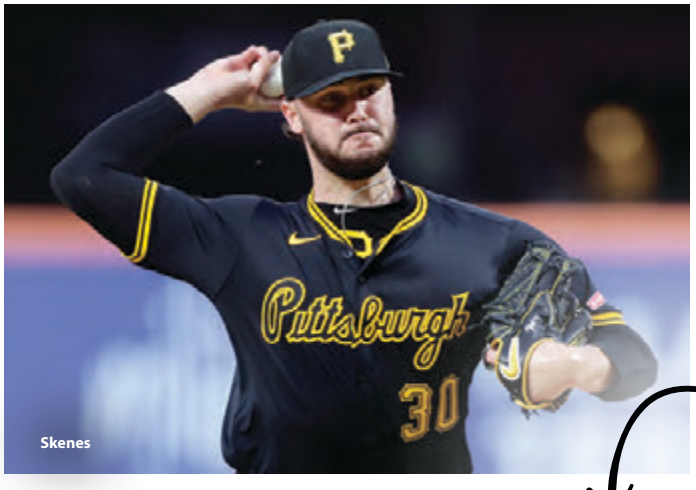
Player Development Wins: All the Pirates' top rotation arms are homegrown draft picks.
Key Rookies: Chandler and No. 1 overall prospect Konnor Griffin are ROY threats.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
1B	Spencer Horwitz	45
2B	Brandon Lowe	50
RF	Bryan Reynolds	50
LF	Ryan O'Hearn	45
DH	Marcell Ozuna	50
CF	Oneil Cruz #89	55
SS	Nick Gonzales	40
3B	Jared Triolo	40
C	Joey Bart	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Paul Skenes #6	75
SP	Mitch Keller	55
SP	Braxton Ashcraft	50
SP	Bubba Chandler	50
SP	Jose Urquidy	45
SP	Jared Jones	50
CL	Dennis Santana	50
RP	Isaac Mattson	45
RP	Gregory Soto	40

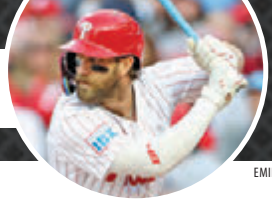


Skenes

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #1

Having the best prospect in baseball in shortstop **Konnor Griffin** is a great start, but it's the depth of top-tier prospects, including righthanders **Bubba Chandler** and **Seth Hernandez** and outfielder **Edward Florentino**, that puts the Pirates at No. 1 in the farm rankings. Pittsburgh's second-tier depth is less impressive, but it's better to have elite prospects in quantities than depth.

MILESTONEWATCH



BRYCE HARPER
36 HR FROM 400

A big year from Bryce Harper would put him past 400 home runs, with five more seasons under contract to chase 500.

EMILEE CHINN/GETTY IMAGES

#22 DIAMONDBACKS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 45

The D-backs led all clubs in runs scored in 2024 and fell back to sixth in 2025. They figure to take another small step back this season. Josh Naylor and Eugenio Suarez are gone. **Lourdes Gurriel Jr.** is rehabbing from ACL knee surgery, while **Corbin Carroll** had hamate surgery in the spring. The top of the order is strong, with **Geraldo Perdomo**, **Ketel Marte**, Carroll and **Gabriel Moreno**, but the rest of the lineup lacks punch. Arizona's rotation, led by **Merrill Kelly**, **Zac Gallen**, **Ryne Nelson** and **Brandon Pfaadt,** will keep the team in games.

Player Development Wins: Carroll and Perdomo are all-stars. **Pavin Smith**, **Alek Thomas**, Nelson and Pfaadt are contributors.
Key Rookies: Gurriel's recovery opens the window for **Ryan Waldschmidt** to play.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Geraldo Perdomo #45	60
2B	Ketel Marte #32	65
RF	Corbin Carroll #17	70
C	Gabriel Moreno #69	55
DH	Pavin Smith	45
LF	Lourdes Gurriel Jr.	50
3B	Nolan Arenado	45
1B	Carlos Santana	45
CF	Alek Thomas	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Merrill Kelly	50
SP	Zac Gallen	55
SP	Ryne Nelson	50
SP	Eduardo Rodriguez	45
SP	Brandon Pfaadt	50
SP	Michael Soroka	45
CL	Kevin Ginkel	45
RP	Paul Sewald	45
RP	Ryan Thompson	40

Carroll

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #25

Arizona has doubled down on drafting solid hitters in recent drafts, a trend that should lead to a significant number of future big leaguers. Examples include 2025 first-round shortstop **Kayson Cunningham**, second baseman **Demetrio Crisantes** and outfielders **Ryan Waldschmidt** and **Slade Caldwell**. The question now is: How many impact big leaguers are down on the farm?

#23 TWINS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 40

The collapse of the regional sports network model hurt the Twins as much as any team. After ramping up payroll in the early 2020s, Minnesota scaled back dramatically in 2024 and 2025, in the latter season trading away 10 major leaguers at the deadline. What remains is a roster that could compete if everything goes right—but could lead to further payroll shedding if it doesn't. Stars **Byron Buxton** and **Joe Ryan** are still here, but it's going to be up to young players such as **Royce Lewis**, **Luke Keaschall**, **Brooks Lee** and **Taj Bradley** to step forward.

Player Development Wins: The lineup is full of Twins draftees.
Key Rookies: Four of the Twins' top prospects—**Walker Jenkins**, **Emmanuel Rodriguez**, **Kaelen Culpepper** and **Connor Prielipp**—could factor this year.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
CF	Byron Buxton #47	60
2B	Luke Keaschall	50
1B	Josh Bell	45
RF	Matt Wallner	45
C	Ryan Jeffers	50
LF	Trevor Larnach	45
3B	Royce Lewis	50
DH	Victor Caratini	40
SS	Brooks Lee	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Joe Ryan #83	55
SP	Bailey Ober	45
SP	Simeon Woods Richardson	45
SP	Taj Bradley	45
SP	Mick Abel	45
SP	David Festa	45
CL	Taylor Rogers	45
RP	Justin Topa	45
RP	Kody Funderburk	40

Buxton

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #12

The Twins' historic trade deadline sell-off added talent to an already promising system. Minnesota has depth and balance, but many of the organization's players come with a fair amount of risk. None more so than the trio at the top: outfielders **Walker Jenkins** and **Emmanuel Rodriguez** and lefthander **Connor Prielipp**, all of whom are close to major league ready but have lengthy injury histories.

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (CARROLL), GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES (RAMIREZ), BRANDON SLOTER/GETTY IMAGES (BUXTON), JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES (SKENES)

#24 RAYS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 40

The Rays looked at their 85-loss season and the four behemoths surrounding them in the AL East and decided to play for tomorrow. Tampa Bay traded Brandon Lowe, Shane Baz and Josh Lowe to bring back a collection of younger (and cheaper) players. The Rays imported a few veterans—**Steven Matz**, **Nick Martinez**, **Gavin Lux**, **Cedric Mullins**—to surround a core that includes young star **Junior Caminero**, dependable **Yandy Diaz**, emerging **Jonathan Aranda** and a rotation led by **Drew Rasmussen**, **Ryan Pepiot** and **Shane McClanahan**.

Player Development Wins: The Rays' roster is typically full of other teams' signees. This year's squad is no exception.
Key Rookies: Carson Williams should claim a share of the shortstop job.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
2B	Gavin Lux	45
DH	Yandy Diaz	50
1B	Jonathan Aranda	50
3B	Junior Caminero #23	65
CF	Cedric Mullins	45
RF	Jake Fraley	40
SS	Taylor Walls	45
LF	Chandler Simpson	45
C	Nick Fortes	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Drew Rasmussen	55
SP	Ryan Pepiot #92	55
SP	Shane McClanahan	50
SP	Nick Martinez	45
SP	Steven Matz	50
SP	Ian Seymour	45
CL	Edwin Uceta	50
RP	Griffin Jax	50
RP	Garrett Cleavinger	50

Rasmussen

Caminero

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #5

The Rays added eight prospects to their top 30 in the offseason through trades and international signings. Trading Shane Baz yielded **Michael Forret**, **Slater de Brun** and **Caden Bodine**, while dealing Brandon Lowe brought back **Jacob Melton** and **Anderson Brito**. Tampa Bay still lacks truly elite prospects, but it now has a wide array of players who could emerge in 2026.

MILESTONEWATCH

FRANCISCO LINDOR
21 HR FROM 300

Cal Ripken Jr. and Alex Rodriguez are the only others with 300 home runs while in the lineup at shortstop.

ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

#25 MARLINS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 40

The Marlins subtracted talent in the offseason by trading young starters Edward Cabrera and Ryan Weathers, but Miami has the type of pitching depth to cover those losses, led by **Sandy Alcantara** and **Eury Perez**. The Cabrera deal brought back powerful **Owen Caissie**, who teams with **Kyle Stowers** and **Jakob Marsee** in a talented outfield. Every Marlins lineup starter was acquired from another team, with **Xavier Edwards**, **Otto Lopez** and **Agustin Ramirez** playing up the middle.

Player Development Wins: Perez has frontline rotation potential. First-rounders **Max Meyer** and **Braxton Garrett** have clear lanes to claim rotation spots.
Key Rookies: Caissie will play. Catcher **Joe Mack** could emerge. Lefties **Thomas White** and **Robby Snelling** could be the Marlins' next young pitching sensations.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
CF	Jakob Marsee	50
2B	Xavier Edwards	50
LF	Kyle Stowers	55
C	Agustin Ramirez	45
DH	Griffin Conine	45
SS	Otto Lopez	50
1B	Liam Hicks	45
3B	Connor Norby	40
RF	Owen Caissie	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Sandy Alcantara #97	55
SP	Eury Perez	55
SP	Chris Paddack	45
SP	Max Meyer	50
SP	Braxton Garrett	50
SP	Robby Snelling	45
CL	Pete Fairbanks	50
RP	Calvin Faucher	45
RP	Tyler Phillips	45

Perez

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #8

Miami's progress is most evident on the mound, where top prospects **Thomas White** and **Robby Snelling** are nearing the major leagues. Position player help is close behind, with catcher **Joe Mack** and outfielder **Owen Caissie** approaching readiness, while the lower minors are stocked with upside. This represents the deepest and most credible promise the Marlins' farm system has shown in years.

#26 CARDINALS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 40

As **Chaim Bloom** assumed control of baseball operations in the offseason, the Cardinals shed any and all veteran commitments as they rebuilt and reconfigured their roster. Gone are veterans Sonny Gray, Willson Contreras, Brendan Donovan and Nolan Arenado, all traded for prospects. What remains is a young squad in which no projected lineup regular or starting pitcher is older than 28. That creates opportunities for players such as **Masyn Winn**, **Ivan Herrera**, **Lars Nootbaar**, **Alec Burleson**, **Nolan Gorman** and **Jordan Walker** to step forward. Same for pitchers **Matthew Liberatore**, **Michael McGreevy** and import **Dustin May**.
Player Development Wins: St. Louis could run out an all-homegrown lineup.
Key Rookies: JJ Wetherholt looks like the man at second base and has NL Rookie of the Year potential. Lefties **Quinn Mathews** and **Liam Doyle** could force callups.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
LF	Lars Nootbaar	50
DH	Ivan Herrera	50
1B	Alec Burleson	50
3B	Nolan Gorman	45
SS	Masyn Winn #74	55
2B	JJ Wetherholt	50
RF	Jordan Walker	45
C	Pedro Pages	40
CF	Victor Scott II	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Matthew Liberatore	50
SP	Dustin May	45
SP	Andre Pallante	45
SP	Michael McGreevy	45
SP	Kyle Leahy	45
SP	Richard Fitts	45
CL	Riley O'Brien	50
RP	JoJo Romero	45
RP	Matt Svanson	45

Winn

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #2

The Cardinals are in the throes of the organization's first modern rebuild, and they boast one of the most talented farm systems in the game. There's a good balance of impact position players in shortstop **JJ Wetherholt**, catcher **Rainiel Rodriguez** and outfielder **Joshua Baez** and impact pitching with lefthanders **Liam Doyle**, **Quinn Mathews** and **Brandon Clarke**.

JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES (RASMUSSEN), KYREASE DESSEAU/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (CAMINERO), SAM HODDE/GETTY IMAGES (PEREZ), JOE PUETZ/GETTY IMAGES (WINN)

#27 ANGELS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 30

The Angels have the longest active playoff drought in MLB, and it doesn't look like it will end this season. Anaheim lost 90 games last year and 99 in 2024. The club has solid young players in place, including **Zach Neto**, **Jose Soriano**, **Jo Adell**, **Reid Detmers** and **Nolan Schanuel**, and it made opportunistic trades to acquire post-hype **Grayson Rodriguez**, **Josh Lowe** and **Vaughn Grissom**. Still, the roster lacks hitting, pitching, fielding and overall cohesion.

Player Development Wins: The Angels prioritize college players in the early rounds of the draft and rush them to MLB. The strategy worked with Neto but has produced mixed results for Detmers and Schanuel.
Key Rookie: If he clicks, righthander **Tyler Bremner's** minors time will be short.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Zach Neto #26	65
1B	Nolan Schanuel	50
DH	Mike Trout	50
3B	Yoan Moncada	40
CF	Jo Adell	50
RF	Josh Lowe	45
LF	Jorge Soler	45
C	Logan O'Hoppe	45
2B	Christian Moore	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Yusei Kikuchi	50
SP	Jose Soriano #88	55
SP	Reid Detmers	50
SP	Grayson Rodriguez	50
SP	Alek Manoah	45
SP	Caden Dana	45
CL	Robert Stephenson	45
RP	Drew Pomeranz	45
RP	Kirby Yates	45

Neto

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #28

As has been the case in many recent years, the Angels have some intriguing prospects at the top of their system, but overall depth remains far below that of many other organizations. Some of that is because of the team's tendency to push players quickly to the majors, which means 2024 first-rounder **Christian Moore** doesn't qualify as a prospect anymore.

#28 WHITE SOX

OVERALL BA GRADE: 30

After losing a record 121 games in 2024, the White Sox improved by 19 wins in 2025 and can begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Those gains were realized primarily by quality 2025 rookies such as **Colson Montgomery**, **Chase Meidroth**, **Kyle Teel** and **Shane Smith**. Chicago won the bidding for 26-year-old Japanese slugger **Munetaka Murakami**, signed closer **Seranthony Dominguez** and also brought back **Anthony Kay** from NPB.

Player Development Wins: So many of Chicago's top young players were acquired from other teams. Montgomery is an exception.
Key Rookie: Murakami could challenge for AL Rookie of the Year. Outfielder **Braden Montgomery** and lefties **Noah Schultz** and **Hagen Smith** all could debut.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
2B	Chase Meidroth	45
C	Kyle Teel	50
SS	Colson Montgomery	50
3B	Miguel Vargas	45
LF	Andrew Benintendi	45
1B	Munetaka Murakami	50
RF	Austin Hays	45
CF	Brooks Baldwin	40
DH	Edgar Quero	45

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Shane Smith	50
SP	Davis Martin	45
SP	Sean Burke	45
SP	Anthony Kay	45
SP	Erick Fedde	40
SP	Jonathan Cannon	40
CL	Seranthony Dominguez	50
RP	Jordan Leasure	40
RP	Grant Taylor	50

Montgomery

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #18

The White Sox have made significant strides in player development in recent years, but the development of lefthanders **Noah Schultz** and **Hagen Smith** remains one of the big to-do items for 2026 and beyond. Shortstop **Caleb Bonemer's** emergence as a top prospect gives the White Sox another potential long-term building block.

MILESTONEWATCH

JOSE ALTUVE
112 HITS FROM 2,500

Jose Altuve has 2,244 hits while in the lineup at second base. The record is 2,687 by Roberto Alomar.

ALEX SLITZ/GETTY IMAGES

#29 NATIONALS

OVERALL BA GRADE: 20

The Nationals were deprived a chance to victory lap their 2019 World Series title during the pandemic season, and then failed to capitalize on a bountiful Juan Soto trade in 2022. Now, they start over with new head of baseball operations **Paul Toboni**, who helped shape the Red Sox's draft success. He had an active off-season in which he traded No. 1 starter **MacKenzie Gore** to the Rangers for five prospects and closer **Jose Ferrer** to the Mariners for prospect catcher **Harry Ford**.

Player Development Wins: Draft picks **Daylen Lile** and **Dylan Crews** project as everyday outfielders, while **Luis Garcia Jr.**, **Brady House** and **Jacob Young** will play a lot. Starters **Cade Cavalli** and **Brad Lord** are homegrown.
Key Rookie: Ford has a chance to wrest away playing time at catcher.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
DH	James Wood	55
SS	CJ Abrams #84	55
LF	Daylen Lile	50
RF	Dylan Crews	50
1B	Luis Garcia Jr.	45
C	Keibert Ruiz	40
3B	Brady House	45
2B	Nasim Nuñez	40
CF	Jacob Young	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Miles Mikolas	45
SP	Cade Cavalli	50
SP	Brad Lord	45
SP	Josiah Gray	45
SP	Foster Griffin	50
SP	Jake Irvin	45
CL	Clayton Beeter	45
RP	Cole Henry	40
RP	PJ Poulin	40

Wood

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #16

Led by the 2025 No. 1 overall pick **Eli Willits**, the Nationals' system leans heavily on shortstops and also boasts power arms aplenty in the top 10. Now, incoming head of operations **Paul Toboni** is tasked with coaxing more on-field production from the system's players. Offseason trades for **Harry Ford**, **Luis Perales** and **Gavin Fien** help enhance the quality of the top 10.

#30 ROCKIES

OVERALL BA GRADE: 20

The Rockies' long road back to relevancy began in November when the club hired **Paul DePodesta** as president of baseball operations. Colorado has few bankable regulars though it does have up-the-middle presence via **Hunter Goodman**, **Ezequiel Tovar** and **Brenton Doyle**. Otherwise, the future is the focus. DePodesta acquired post-hype 20-somethings **Jake McCarthy** and **Edouard Julien** and signed free agents **Willi Castro**, **Michael Lorenzen** and **Jose Quintana**.

Player Development Wins: Goodman, Tovar and Doyle are homegrown, while young major leaguers **Chase Dollander**, **Jordan Beck** and **Kyle Karros** could step forward. **Kyle Freeland** is the all-time franchise leader with 231 starts.
Key Rookies: Slugging first baseman **Charlie Condon** will be up if he hits.

KEY HITTERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SS	Ezequiel Tovar	55
DH	Mickey Moniak	45
C	Hunter Goodman	50
LF	Jordan Beck	45
1B	Troy Johnston	40
CF	Brenton Doyle	45
3B	Willi Castro	45
RF	Jake McCarthy	40
2B	Edouard Julien	40

KEY PITCHERS

Pos	Player	BA Grade
SP	Kyle Freeland	50
SP	Michael Lorenzen	45
SP	Jose Quintana	45
SP	Chase Dollander	45
SP	Tomoyuki Sugano	45
SP	Tanner Gordon	40
CL	Victor Vodnik	45
RP	Jimmy Herget	40
RP	Juan Mejia	40

Tovar

FARM SYSTEM RANKING #30

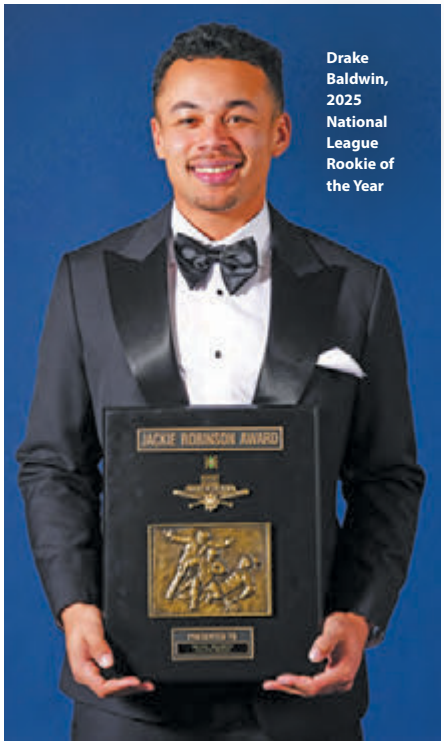
Paul DePodesta and the new Rockies brass have a steep mountain to climb, given the current state of the farm system. Colorado has long targeted players with upside, but that promise too often fades once they reach the majors. Shortstop **Ethan Holliday** and first baseman **Charlie Condon** are the organization's top prospects, but even they come with major questions.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/GETTY IMAGES (NETO), JOE ROBBINS/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES (MONTGOMERY), EMILEE CHINN/GETTY IMAGES (WOOD), JUSTIN EDMONDS/GETTY IMAGES (TOVAR)

TOP 20 ROOKIES

The top first-year talent for 2026, taking both talent and opportunity into account

by BA STAFF



Drake Baldwin, 2025 National League Rookie of the Year

Nick Kurtz, 2025 American League Rookie of the Year

DANIEL SHIREY/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Rookies and other young players are the lifeblood of an MLB organization.

It's just hard to know which ones will click right away—and which ones will require additional lessons while learning on the job against MLB competition.

But that doesn't stop us from trying to forecast this year's top rookies. Here, we rank our top 20 based on how we think they'll perform in the 2026 season.

Last year, we led off our rookie ranking with Roki Sasaki, Dylan Crews and Jackson Jobe. While all three made Opening Day rosters, none distinguished himself.

Further down the rookie ranking, we identified the upside potential of both eventual Rookies of the Year, ranking Braves catcher Drake Baldwin at No. 12 and Athletics first baseman Nick Kurtz—a 2024 draft pick with just 12 games of pro experience—at No. 18.

1 NOLAN McLEAN

TEAM: METS **AGE:** 24 **POS:** RHP

The Case For: McLean proved his mettle in an eight-start 2025 debut. He throws six distinct pitches, headlined by a high-spin sweeper and curveball and complemented by a changeup and cutter he reserves mostly for lefthanded batters. McLean throws hard, misses bats and keeps the ball on the ground.

The Case Against: McLean posted a 2.06 ERA in 48 innings that will be practically impossible to replicate over a full season. But that's really the only concern with McLean, whom the Mets are counting on to be a key rotation member.

TOM DIPACE

5 KEVIN McGONIGLE

TEAM: TIGERS **AGE:** 21 **POS:** SS

The Case For: McGonigle not only has the best pure hitting ability in this year's rookie class; he's one of the best overall hitting prospects of the past 15 years. He could pry his way into the Tigers' lineup, and once he arrives, McGonigle should be a central figure for years to come.

The Case Against: McGonigle is stretched defensively at shortstop, and his logical other landing spot—second base—is blocked by Gleyber Torres. Position questions could lead to him spending a half season or more in Triple-A.

NORM HALL/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

2 JJ WETHERHOLT

TEAM: CARDINALS **AGE:** 23 **POS:** 2B

The Case For: Wetherholt's combination of plus-plus bat-to-ball ability, elite on-base skills and blossoming power could result in Rookie of the Year-worthy numbers. He should provide value at second or third base, with Masyn Winn manning shortstop for the Cardinals.
The Case Against: St. Louis doesn't have the most potent lineup, and Busch Stadium plays below-average for lefthanded power. The bigger issue could be Wetherholt's more opposite-field power approach and lack of elite exit velocity data or angles.

NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

3 KONNOR GRIFFIN

TEAM: PIRATES **AGE:** 20 **POS:** SS

The Case For: Griffin has MVP-level upside with a treasure trove of tools. Even cautious evaluators have invoked Mike Trout comparisons. Few rookies can influence the game in as many ways, and with no shortstop blocking him, the Pirates are incentivized to push Griffin aggressively if he shows he's ready.
The Case Against: It's quite possible Griffin isn't ready given his 21 total games of upper-level experience. A more cautious, deliberate path would limit his 2026 impact, even if it better serves his long-term development.

BRACE HEMMELGARN/MINNESOTA TWINS/GETTY IMAGES

4 TREY YESAVAGE

TEAM: BLUE JAYS **AGE:** 22 **POS:** RHP

The Case For: Yesavage's fastball, slider and splitter drive lots of whiffs and chases. He dominates with a north-south game plan by riding his four-seam as well as anyone in the sport, while cascading his devastating splitter off of it. Yesavage's over-the-top slot and unusual lack of a pitch that breaks gloveside makes him an unusual look for hitters.
The Case Against: Will his lack of a pitch that moves gloveside lead to platoon split issues? Likely only injury can hold Yesavage back from competing for Rookie of the Year honors.

ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES

6 BUBBA CHANDLER

TEAM: PIRATES **AGE:** 23 **POS:** RHP

The Case For: Chandler parks his fastball near 100 mph and MLB hitters struggled with his changeup. His control also took a significant step forward once he reached the majors, where he quietly impressed outside of one rough outing. Now, he enters 2026 with a much clearer path to seizing a rotation spot.
The Case Against: Chandler's Triple-A fastball command was shaky in 2025 and his slider can be inconsistent. If those issues resurface, they will create some concerning volatility from start to start.

EDWARD M. PIO RODA/GETTY IMAGES

7 CARTER JENSEN

TEAM: ROYALS **AGE:** 22 **POS:** C

The Case For: Jensen is a well-rounded catcher who hit 20 home runs in the minors in 2025 and another three last September in an impressive MLB debut. Salvador Perez is 35 years old, so there should be plenty of at-bats for Jensen between serving as the No. 2 catcher and DH.
The Case Against: The demanding nature of catching means more volatility for rookies at the position. While Drake Baldwin won NL Rookie of the Year last year, he, Austin Wells and Adley Rutschman are the only backstops to finish top three in voting this decade.

SCOTT MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES

8 KAZUMA OKAMOTO

TEAM: BLUE JAYS **AGE:** 30 **POS:** 3B

The Case For: Okamoto has hit high-quality pitching for years in Japan. He's a strong contact hitter with on-base skills and 20-homer power potential. He avoids strikeouts, walks at a high clip and shows at least average power. He is a decorated defender at third base and can play first base and the corner outfield.
The Case Against: Japanese hitters don't have the same success rate as pitchers. It's possible Okamoto is more of an average hitter who avoids strikeouts but whose power plays down.

COLE BURSTON/GETTY IMAGES

9 TATSUYA IMAI

TEAM: ASTROS **AGE:** 28 **POS:** RHP

The Case For: Imai has a unique arsenal not that different from fellow rookie Trey Yesavage. He throws a slider that moves armside and a splitter. Imai has an interesting release on his fastball and good velocity. There's a chance he translates as a midrotation starter immediately.
The Case Against: Imai faces questions about how his fastball will play in MLB after underwhelming swing-and-miss metrics in NPB. There's nothing in his arsenal that moves gloveside, while underperformance and injuries lurk with every rookie pitcher.

TOM DIPACE

10 SAMUEL BASALLO

TEAM: ORIOLES **AGE:** 21 **POS:** C/DH

The Case For: Basallo's power potential gives him a shot to lead all rookies in home runs. While his late-season MLB debut didn't produce gaudy statistics, his underlying metrics continued to show his power potential, bat speed and solid batting eye. Defensively, Basallo passed the test as a plausible backup.
The Case Against: Basallo has to hit to ward off Ryan Mountcastle and other young Orioles hitters to see regular playing time at DH, especially with Pete Alonso now at first base. Basallo also will serve as backup catcher.

TIM WARNER/GETTY IMAGES

11 SAL STEWART

TEAM: REDS **AGE:** 22 **POS:** 1B

The Case For: Even after the Reds signed Eugenio Suarez, Stewart is set to be a key part of the lineup. His hitting ability should provide a boost for a team that needs to score more runs. Stewart's hit-first approach should help him avoid long cold streaks, and he has learned how to tap into his power as well.
The Case Against: Stewart fits best at first base, but with Suarez and Spencer Steer on the roster, Stewart will likely also play some third and even second base, where his limitations are much more apparent.

SCOTT MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES

12 MUNETAKA MURAKAMI

TEAM: WHITE SOX **AGE:** 26 **POS:** 1B

The Case For: Murakami set the NPB single-season home run record for a Japanese-born player in 2022 with 56 bombs. He has struggled to replicate that production, but his plus-plus raw power and on-base skills have been constants. If he can make enough contact, Murakami has 30-homer upside.
The Case Against: Murakami faces major swing-and-miss concerns against spin and velocity. How his hit tool will translate is a massive question. He also lacks any defensive value and is likely relegated to first base and DH.

GEOFF STELLFOX/GETTY IMAGES

13 CARSON BENGE

TEAM: METS **AGE:** 23 **POS:** LF

The Case For: Teammates with Nolan McLean at Oklahoma State, Benge will look to pair with him again as a Mets rookie this season. Benge has a bead on the Mets' right field job and projects to be a do-everything player who contributes in every category while supplying defensive value and speed.
The Case Against: Benge scuffled at Triple-A in a 22-game sample last year, but his luck should even out. As with many young lefthanded batters, same-side matchups may pose an initial challenge.

TOM DIPACE

14 COLT EMERSON

TEAM: MARINERS **AGE:** 20 **POS:** SS

The Case For: Last season, Emerson made real progress in an already impressive pro career. He reached Triple-A just two years after being drafted as one of the youngest players in the 2023 class. The 20-year-old saw an increase in power by belting a career-high 16 home runs, aided by the addition of a toe tap to his swing.
The Case Against: Emerson's bat might need a little more polish, and the Mariners having a slightly crowded infield could block his path initially. But if he hits in spring training, he could force the issue.

ROB LEITER/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Mets rookie duo Nolan McLean and Carson Benge

TOM DIPACE

Orioles rookies Samuel Basallo and Dylan Beavers

Pirates rookies Konnor Griffin and Bubba Chandler

TIM WARNER/GETTY IMAGES (BASALLO, BEAVERS), JULIO AGUILAR/GETTY IMAGES (GRIFFIN, CHANDLER)

15 CHASE DeLAUTER

TEAM: GUARDIANS **AGE:** 24 **POS:** CF

The Case For: The Guardians trust in DeLauter's impact potential. Last October, he became just the sixth player ever to make his big league debut in a playoff game. DeLauter has good strike-zone recognition, decent contact and the ability to pound a baseball with plus power.

The Case Against: Health has been an issue for the 24-year-old DeLauter, who has played just 138 games in four pro seasons. He has primarily dealt with foot issues, but in 2025 he added wrist surgery to his résumé.

NICK CAMMETT/GETTY IMAGES

16 DYLAN BEAVERS

TEAM: ORIOLES **AGE:** 24 **POS:** RF

The Case For: Beavers' combination of plate discipline, speed and solid defense stood out at Triple-A Norfolk and helped him earn the Orioles' everyday left field job last September. He is ticketed to join the outfield mix this year and should be a well-rounded regular.

The Case Against: Multiple Orioles rookie outfielders have found out how difficult it is to win playing time. No Orioles outfielder reached 400 plate appearances in 2025, and just Colton Cowser, Austin Hays and Anthony Santander have reached 500 PAs since 2023.

MITCHELL LAYTON/GETTY IMAGES

17 OWEN CAISSIE

TEAM: MARLINS **AGE:** 23 **POS:** RF

The Case For: Caissie has plus-plus power, strong on-base skills and has improved his bat-to-ball skills in recent years. He has two full years of Triple-A experience and has MLB time. The Marlins should have plenty of opportunities for Caissie to earn at-bats. Making contact, getting to his power and playing average corner outfield defense could go a long way.

The Case Against: Skepticism about Caissie centers on his propensity to swing and miss and his at-times adventurous defense. He will need to hit for power consistently to succeed.

TOM DIPACE

18 BRYCE ELDRIDGE

TEAM: GIANTS **AGE:** 21 **POS:** 1B/DH

The Case For: Eldridge is one of the most physically imposing prospects, standing at a towering 6-foot-7, 219 pounds. His elite frame is matched by some of the best raw power among this year's prospects, giving him true impact potential at the plate.

The Case Against: Eldridge is currently blocked by Rafael Devers at first base, is a struggling defender and has some serious swing-and-miss concerns that showed during his 2025 callup. It's important to remember that he is still just 21.

LACHLAN CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES

19 JOE MACK

TEAM: MARLINS **AGE:** 23 **POS:** C

The Case For: The Marlins had an all-rookie catching corps for much of 2025, with Liam Hicks and Agustin Ramirez sharing the job. Mack isn't the on-base machine Hicks is, but he has solid power and a much better glove than either Hicks or Ramirez. He won the minor league Gold Glove in 2024.

The Case Against: Ramirez's bat could give the Marlins incentive to keep trying to develop him as a catcher. If that happens, the Marlins could decide to give Mack more time in Triple-A to develop.

NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

20 CONNELLY EARLY

TEAM: RED SOX **AGE:** 24 **POS:** LHP

The Case For: Early burst into the top prospect picture last spring after a good performance in spring training. He pitched his way into the rotation down the stretch, making pivotal starts. Early has a deep arsenal of weapons and the ability to command the ball. He keeps hitters off-balance, throws strikes and changes eye levels, moving the ball around the zone.

The Case Against: With so many mouths to feed in the Red Sox rotation, it's possible someone out-pitches Early and pushes him out of the rotation.

JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

OTHERS TO WATCH **Moises Ballesteros** C, Cubs | **Justin Crawford** CF, Phillies | **Logan Henderson** RHP, Brewers | **Robby Snelling** LHP, Marlins | **Payton Tolle** LHP, Red Sox

BA BREAKOUT

JOHN FISHER/GETTY IMAGES

Jackson Chourio
OF, Brewers

Chourio has averaged 3 WAR per season over his first two years. He's already an above-average player, but with more than 1,000 plate appearances under his belt and still entering his age-22 season, there should come a point when he reaches a new level and plays his way into MVP conversations. Don't be surprised if that happens this season.

VAUGHN RIDLEY/GETTY IMAGES

Addison Barger
OF, Blue Jays

Barger had a solid 2025 and took it up a notch in the playoffs. The 26-year-old has the talent to build on that with elite bat speed and impact ability. His contact skills improved in 2025, and if he takes another step forward against lefties, he could push for 30 homers.

ALEJANDRA VILLALOARCA/NEWSDAY RM VIA GETTY IMAGES

Francisco Alvarez
C, Mets

Just 25 catchers in MLB history have batted more times through their age-23 seasons than Alvarez. He would place even higher on that list if not for a series of hand injuries that cost him about 100 IL days in 2023 and 2024. What Alvarez showed in the second half last season should pique everybody's interest. He boosted his flyball and pulled-air contact and produced a .921 OPS while hitting eight home runs in 41 games.

MEGAN BRIGGS/GETTY IMAGES

Dylan Crews
OF, Nationals

Now entering his age-24 season, Crews has shown flashes of the player we expected him to become as the No. 2 overall pick in 2023. But he has never shown that over a sustained period of time. A full season with good health could change that.

DILIP VISHWANAT/GETTY IMAGES

Ivan Herrera
C, Cardinals

In his last 162 games, spanning 2024 and 2025, Herrera batted .297/.382/.456 with 21 home runs. The issue isn't raw ability—it's health. Herrera had offseason elbow surgery to remove loose bodies but is expected to be ready for Opening Day and likely will be the Cardinals' primary DH. A full healthy season could yield a huge season for Herrera in which he hits for a high average, ranks among the leaders in OBP and puts together his first 20-homer season.

T PLAYERS

We choose 10 young players—five hitters and five pitchers—poised to break out in 2026

KATELYN MULCAHY/GETTY IMAGES

Emmet Sheehan
RHP, Dodgers

After a strong second half in 2025, Sheehan looks poised to grab a rotation spot. His secondary stuff is dominant, and if he can refine his fastball command, that pitch could even take a step forward. Sheehan was one of just seven starters in 2025 with at least 70 innings who had a strikeout rate greater than 30% and walk rate less than 8%.

MATT DIRKSEN/CHICAGO CUBS/GETTY IMAGES

Jacob Misiorowski
RHP, Brewers

We saw flashes of brilliance last year from Misiorowski. Now, he could be ready to take another step forward synchronizing the long limbs on his 6-foot-7 frame to throw more strikes, take advantage of elite raw stuff and become a frontline starter.

ROB TRINGALI/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Gavin Williams
RHP, Guardians

In the first half of 2025, Williams pitched to a career-low 3.70 ERA across 97.1 innings. He was in the midst of adjusting his pitch usage by introducing a sinker. Following the all-star break, Williams was a new pitcher. He threw his four-seamer less, upped the usage of his sinker to 12.6% and started to throw his curveball more than his slider. What followed were elite results: 7-1 record, 2.18 ERA over 70.1 innings with a 27.6% strikeout rate.

ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

Chase Burns
RHP, Reds

Burns has traits similar to those of fellow Reds starter Hunter Greene, including a 100 mph fastball. The required adjustments are also similar: Burns won't be able to blow his fastball past MLB hitters and will need to rely on developing his secondaries to keep hitters off-balance.

MATT KROHN/GETTY IMAGES

Jose Soriano
RHP, Angels

Only Paul Skenes threw a faster average fastball last year than Soriano. The 27-year-old also generated the highest ground-ball rate among qualified starting pitchers. His 65.3% mark makes him one of just three starters to top 60% this decade. There's only one problem for Soriano: Angels infielders scored a worst-in-baseball minus-37 outs above average last season. Even simple regression to the mean could result in a breakthrough.

THE FASTER TRACK

In the 2020s, future big leaguers are spending less development time in the minor leagues

by JJ COOPER

Baseball players generally throw harder, hit the ball harder and run faster than they did a decade ago.

They also are moving a lot more quickly through the minor leagues.

We're not just talking about anecdotal examples. Yes, Athletics first baseman Nick Kurtz barely touched the minors on his way to winning 2025 American League Rookie of the Year. Paul Skenes' instant success with the Pirates led to questions about whether he needed 34 minor league innings as a prelude.

But it's not just a player here or there. Across all MLB teams, players are spending less time in the minors. The entire development process has changed. Now, we're seeing players go from draft or signing day to a big league roster at record rates.

In the late 2010s, the typical progression for a college first-round hitter was to get a brief stint in Rookie or short-season Class A ball in his signing year to acclimate to the pro game before being sent to Low-A. In his first full season the following spring, he would open at High-A to determine whether he was worthy of an in-season promotion to Double-A.

In most cases, even elite college hitters in the 2010s, such as Kris Bryant or Anthony Rendon, would spend their entire second pro seasons in the minor leagues.

Today, time in Rookie ball is often nonexistent for first-round college hitters. Low-A is either a quick stop or skipped entirely. Where High-A used to be a three- to four-month stint, it is now a two-month layover.

Reaching MLB in that second pro season is not at all out of the question. Kurtz did it. So did Zach Neto, Jacob Wilson and Cam Smith.

Taken all together, college first-round hitters in the 2020s are getting an average of 300 fewer plate appearances at Class A and below than they did from 2016 to 2020, dropping from 600 PAs to just under 300.

Slugger Nick Kurtz spent just 32 games in the minor leagues

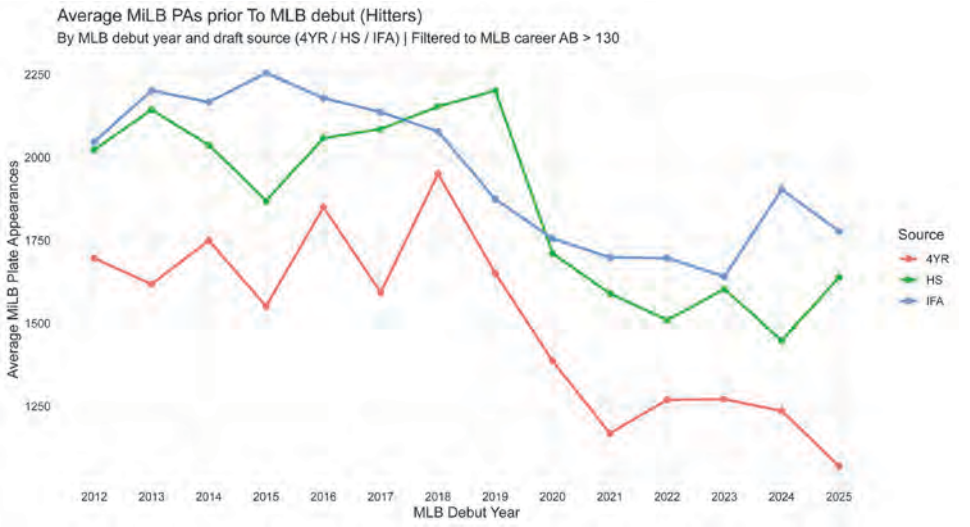
The trend continues in Double-A. The average college first-rounder is getting 140 fewer PAs in Double-A before being promoted (from 466 to 326).

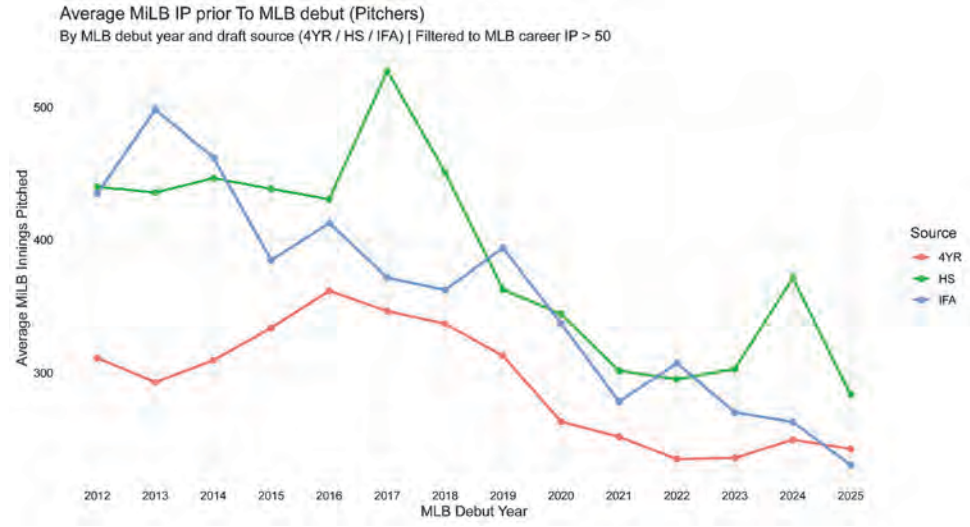
Only at Triple-A is the experience is similar to what it was a decade ago. Now they average 238 PAs, compared to 252 in the 2016-2020 timeframe.

Switch from college hitters to high school first-rounders and the numbers change, but the trend remains the same. High school first-rounders who reach the majors are getting 400 fewer plate appearances in Class A and the Rookie levels than they did from 2016-2020. What was once 1,067 PAs is now 770 on average.

While Rookie-level PAs took the biggest dip, hitters are also getting 80 fewer PAs at each Class A level before moving up. Double-A has seen a 100-PA drop (525 to 424), with only Triple-A remaining roughly in line with the experience level hitters were getting from 2016-2020.

This trend remains true when looking at all hitters, even if the time spent at each level goes up. College hitters are getting nearly 250 fewer PAs on average in Class A and below and 125 fewer PAs on average in Double-A and Triple-A. High school hitters have seen a 300-PA drop in Class A and below experience as well as an 85-PA dip at Double-A/Triple-A. International hitters are averaging 300 fewer PAs in Class A and below and 200 fewer PAs in Double-A/Triple-A.





The trends are very similar for pitchers. From 2021-2025, college pitchers have 87 fewer innings when they debut compared to the same demographic from 2016-2020. High school and international pitchers have 110-120 fewer innings on average. The reductions are seen across Rookie ball, both Class A levels and Double-A, while Triple-A experience has remained effectively the same.

It used to be that a hitter with fewer than 1,250 minor league plate appearances when he was called up was considered an extremely fast mover. Just 15.5% of MLB position players from 2012 to 2019 fit in that category. Now, it's relatively normal.

This decade, 39.7% of position players debut with fewer than 1,250 MiLB PAs on their résumé.

So what's happening?

There are a multitude of theories. This is likely a trend with a variety of contributing factors. Here are some of the theories most mentioned in discussions with MLB front office officials, scouts and coaches.

Minor League Reorganization

MLB eliminated or reclassified the short-season Class A leagues (New York-Penn, Northwest) and Rookie-advanced levels (Appalachian, Pioneer) in the reorganization of the minors in 2021. That, combined with the reduction in number of players each team was allowed to roster, led to a follow-up decision to move the Rookie-level Arizona and Florida Complex Leagues to earlier start dates.

Instead of being a spot for draftees to head after they have signed, those leagues now are filled with players moving up from the Dominican Summer League.

Instead of playing official games, many draftees participate in bridge league workouts and unofficial games in their draft year.

While those players are getting some game-type situations, those games do not count for official statistics. Some of the reduction, in essence, has been a trade of real minor league games for simulated ones and training sessions.

There has been a shift in the perceived level of different classifications as well. The average Low-A hitter in 2015 was roughly 21.5 years old, while the average pitcher was 21.9 years old. In 2025, the average Low-A hitter is a bit under 21 years old, while the average Low-A pitcher is roughly 21.7 years old.

With those levels filled with younger and less experienced players, that dynamic has pushed organizations to move more skilled players out of that level more quickly or have them skip it entirely.

Covid Led To A Canceled Season

The reduction in minor league playing time has continued even as 2021, 2022 and 2023 signees have reached the majors, but the cancellation of the 2020 MiLB season because of the coronavirus pandemic clearly played a role in the dip in MiLB experience among MLB arrivals as the 2020s began, and it still is having an impact to some extent. There continue to be players who were in organizations in 2020 who are making their MLB debuts.

Shortstops Bobby Witt Jr. and CJ Abrams are prime examples of how the lost season affected players' minor league experience. Witt reached the majors with just 160 games in the minors and 744 plate appearances. Abrams' 116 games and 541 plate appearances are among the fewest seen for prep draftees.

In both cases, the 2019 draftees were set to play at Class A in 2020. Instead, Witt and Abrams spent that summer at their teams' alternate training sites. While those games didn't count statistically, they did play a role in both of them reaching the majors in 2022.

The Game Is Getting Younger

Major league rosters are younger—and cheaper—than they were a decade or two ago.

In the 2000s, 51.8% of all MLB plate appearances came from players who were at

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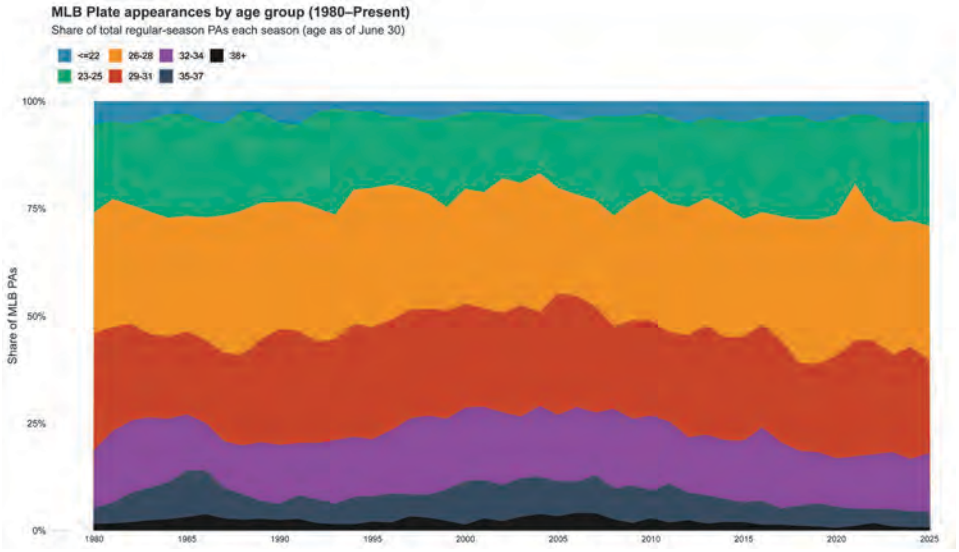
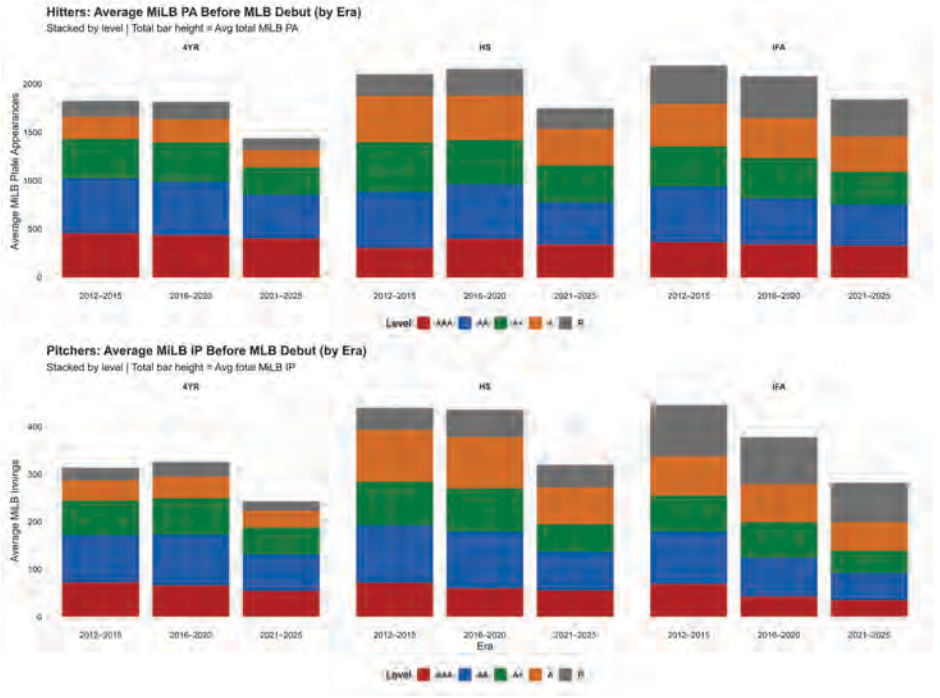




least 29 years old. In the 2010s, that percentage dipped to 45.0%. In the 2020s, it's 42.2%. Last year, it was 39.7%.

Nowadays, fewer hitters are able to hold onto jobs in their 30s. In the 2000s, 27.9% of plate appearances went to hitters 32 or older. This decade, it's 17.5%.

Those plate appearances have gone from the oldest hitters to the youngest. This decade, 26.1% of plate appearances go to hitters 25 years old or younger. In 2025, it was 29.1%, the highest mark of the past 45 years. In the 2000s, players that young accounted for just 21.1% of plate appearances.

Training Has Improved

It wasn't all that many years ago that the offseason was, at best, a time for minor league players to build strength. In reality, for many it was a time to earn enough money in offseason jobs to be able to afford playing for another year.

Now, hitters and pitchers use the offseason to train to fix weaknesses with offseason training plans designed specifically for each individual player. A pitcher who needs a better breaking ball spends the winter toying with new grips. Another makes sure to never skip leg day to add 2-3 mph to his fastball.

Hitters will arrive at spring training with retooled swings that have been honed over months in the cage. A hitter can practice handling elevated fastballs day after day, while another uses weighted-bat training to add needed bat speed.

The ability to measure every in-game moment more precisely has also allowed teams to feel more confident about promoting players more quickly. In 2023, Roman Anthony was hitting .228/.376/.316 at Low-A Salem when the Red Sox promoted him to High-A Greenville.

Anthony's hard-hit rate, chase rate, average exit velocity and other measures that wouldn't have been available a decade earlier made it clear that his on-field statistical results in 42 games didn't match his actual performance and skill.

Anthony hit .294/.412/.569 at Greenville after his promotion. He hit everywhere he went afterward and eventually became the best prospect in baseball.

That improved training is also true before players become professionals. Players often reach pro ball more physically developed and more experienced against top-tier competition than they were in the past.

Most likely, it's all of these factors and several others as well. This is a cycle that somewhat feeds itself. Every Paul Skenes, Zach Neto, Nick Kurtz or Jacob Wilson who flies to the majors and has success helps encourage other teams to push their players faster.

There is a potential downside, however. The reduction in minor league levels and tighter roster limits also forces teams to make quicker decisions. That may mean that some players will end up being left out. For example, it's hard to imagine a team allowing the next Denard Span to develop.

A 2002 first-round pick of the Twins out of high school, Span didn't reach full-season ball until 2004. He needed 901 Double-A plate appearances and another 732 at Triple-A before he was MLB-ready in 2008.

Span went on to produce 28 bWAR and rack up 1,498 hits while holding down center field into his early 30s.

In Span's case, slow and steady development led to a big reward. But in the modern game, very few players are likely to follow that same path. ■

KONNOR GRIFFIN'S SPEEDY ASCENT PLACES HIM IN RARE COMPANY

by JJ COOPER

With top-of-the-scale speed, elite power and plus defense at multiple positions, Konnor Griffin is the best prospect in baseball.

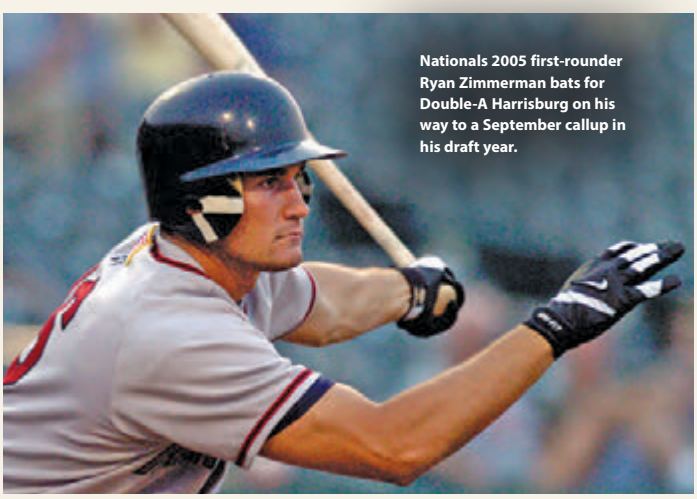
But the Pirates wunderkind has a chance this year to rise above even the best prospects in the game over the 35-plus years of our Top 100 Prospects rankings.

In 2026, Griffin is likely to make a bit of history and serve as the poster child for how modern players move quickly through the minor leagues.

Whether it is Opening Day or later this season, Griffin is expected to make it to Pittsburgh at some point in 2026. If he does, he will be one of the fastest-moving players from the draft to MLB in recent history.

If he makes the Opening Day roster, it will make him the youngest MLB hitter in nine seasons. Griffin will not turn 20 until April 24. So if he breaks camp with the Pirates, he would be doing so as a teenager.

That in itself is unusual. Just 17 teenage position players have reached the majors in the past 40 years, and it has become rarer than seeing a perfect game in the past 20 years. Just five players have done it since 2005. Those players are Justin Upton, Mike Trout, Bryce Harper, Jurickson Profar and Juan Soto. Soto, the most recent example, debuted in May 2018.



Nationals 2005 first-rounder Ryan Zimmerman bats for Double-A Harrisburg on his way to a September callup in his draft year.

Since then, the youngest big league position players are Vladimir Guerrero Jr., who arrived in the majors 41 days after his 20th birthday, and Jackson Chourio, who reached the majors 18 days after he turned 20.

But as young as Griffin is, it is his minor league experience—or lack thereof—that sets him apart. He did not play in an official game in 2024 after he was drafted. In122 games last year, he hit .333/.415/.527 in 563 plate appearances across Low-A, High-A and Double-A, earning Minor League Player of the Year honors.

And that is what may give the Pirates pause when they deliberate as to whether Griffin should make the Opening Day roster. Even among hitters who have made it to the majors before their 21st birthdays, Griffin's total minor league games and plate appearances is exceptionally low.

Since 1985, just 95 position players reached the majors before turning 21. They averaged 303 MiLB games and 1,294 PAs before their debut. Even the hitters who reached the big leagues as teenagers averaged 251 MiLB games and 1,070 PAs. Griffin has roughly half of those levels.

In fact, in the past 40 years, just four players with Griffin's combination of youth and inexperience have reached the big leagues.

But those four players are why the Pirates may consider pushing Griffin quickly to the majors. Because great players are sometimes on a different timetable than everyone else. They announce themselves early, wear out the competition at every stop and force their team to bring them to the big leagues.

Since 1985, the four players who had 130 or fewer MiLB games and 575 or fewer PAs are Ken Griffey Jr. (129 games, 552 PAs), Alex Rodriguez (114, 475), Bryce Harper (130, 536) and Juan Soto (122, 512).

Four players. One was a first-ballot Hall of Famer (Griffey). Another would have been a first ballot Hall of Famer if not for PED suspensions (Rodriguez). Harper and Soto are well on their way to Cooperstown as well.

There's not a bust in the group, and all four were MLB stars at ages when many players are still playing college ball and hoping to be drafted. Each player rewarded his team's decision to push his to the majors so quickly.

Rodriguez finished second in MVP voting as a 20-year-old. Griffey finished third in Rookie of the Year voting as a 19-year-old and the following year began a 10-year streak of all-star appearances and Gold Gloves.

Harper was Rookie of the Year as a 19-year-old and won the National League MVP as a 22-year-old. Soto finished second in the NL Rookie of the Year voting as a 19-year-old, earned MVP votes the following year and led the NL in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging as a 21-year-old.

Spring training is giving Griffin a chance to show he belongs in the majors. If he can crack that Opening Day roster, he'll be putting himself in rare—and elite—company. ■

FEWEST GAMES PLAYED BEFORE MLB DEBUT: 1985-2025*

Position Player	Pos	Debut Year	Debut Age	MiLB Games	MiLB PAs	Overview
Ryan Zimmerman	3B	2005	20.93	67	269	Only college draftee on the list was a September callup in draft year
Alex Rodriguez	SS	1994	18.95	114	475	A-Rod made 14 all-star appearances and won three MVP awards
Juan Soto	OF	2018	19.55	122	512	Soto is the all-time MLB leader in walks through his age-27 season
Ken Griffey Jr.	OF	1989	19.36	129	552	Even with injuries, he hit 630 homers and was a first-ballot Hall of Famer
Bryce Harper	OF	2012	19.53	130	536	The 2010 No. 1 pick skipped two years of high school to speed up his path to majors
Gene Kingsale	OF	1996	20.04	146	595	A blip in the chart. Orioles September callup played three games without ever batting
Jackson Holliday	2B	2024	20.35	154	719	Has shown flashes so far but is still younger than many top prospects
Luis Torrens	C	2017	20.92	160	672	Padres Rule 5 pick out of the Yankees' system has become a solid backup
Manuel Lee	2B	1985	19.81	167	638	Light-hitting middle infielder spent 11 years in the majors

* Younger than 21

American League

ORGANIZATI REPORTS

SPOTLIGHT ON TOP 100 PROSPECTS

PAGE 71 Carter Jensen grew up a Royals fan and suited up for his hometown team last summer. Now, he gets to work with his idol Salvador Perez.

Arnold's Unexpected Fall Becomes Big Win For A's

To say the Athletics hit the jackpot with their 2023 and 2024 first-round picks is an understatement.

They selected shortstop **Jacob Wilson** sixth overall in 2023 and followed with first baseman **Nick Kurtz** fourth overall in 2024.

Kurtz won American League Rookie of the Year in 2025, while Wilson placed second.

Now, the spotlight shifts to 2025 first-round lefthander **Jamie Arnold**, selected 11th overall out of Florida State.

Could he be next to follow the same fast track?

"Physically, I'm ready for it," Arnold said. "I've gotten better this offseason. I've been able to work on a couple of pitches, and this is the best I've ever felt."

While training at Driveline in Florida this winter, Arnold has expanded his repertoire, adding both a cutter and a kick changeup to complement his already-developed split changeup.

The additions give him a deeper, more versatile arsenal, one headlined by a mid-90s fastball and a devastating mid-80s sweeping slider.

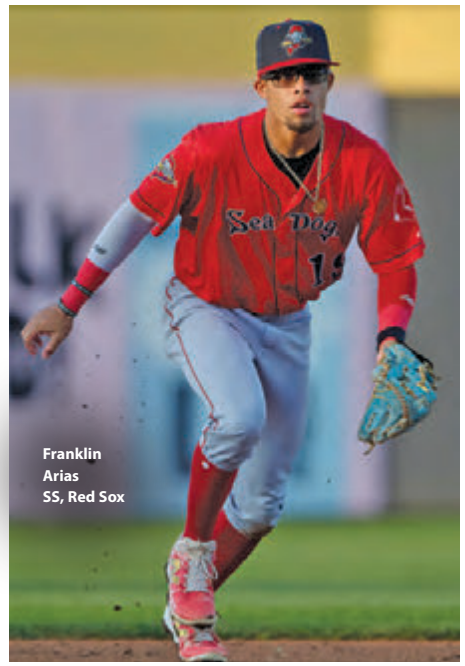
But Arnold's delivery is what makes him dominant. He comes at batters with a three-quarters arm slot paired with a low release height and an explosive, athletic delivery. He's been compared to **Chris Sale**, despite being five inches shorter than the 2024 Cy Young Award winner.

"Hearing my name compared to his is pretty cool," Arnold said. "When I was coming up, I was never really a great pitcher. I was always just pretty average, so when that started happening, it was astonishing."

When Arnold met with the A's at the MLB Draft Combine in Phoenix in June, the meeting was brief because the team didn't think he would be available when it was its turn.

"We were very fortunate that Jamie got to us," A's scouting director **Eric Kubota** said. "He's been successful, but he's really focused on trying to get better and trying to use all the tools at his disposal to get better."

—JESÚS CANO



Franklin Arias SS, Red Sox

ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES (JENSEN), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (ARIAS)

Busy Beavers Keeps Working To Improve

Dylan Beavers is one of the rare Orioles hitters reporting to spring training camp who enjoyed a strong 2025 season.

New manager **Craig Albernaz** is already impressed by how little that matters to the rookie outfielder.

"For Dylan to have that instant success, it gives him a lot of confidence," Albernaz said, "but with Dylan, the type of person he is, he doesn't feel that way. He feels like he still has to work and get better, and that's a testament to who he is.

"For us, even if you have success, there's always ways to kind of turn the dial to get better, and that's how guys play 10 years in the league and be a force in this league. That's something that Dylan has potential to do."

Beavers has been in dogged pursuit of that greatness since the Orioles drafted him 33rd overall in 2022 out of California. He spent his first full minor league season trying to overhaul his swing, but after he slugged .413 in 119 games at Double-A Bowie in 2024, his pro career was at a bit of a crossroads.

Entering the 2025 season, Beavers found a solution that involved the first move of his swing that allowed him to be more balanced and on time against fastballs, which helped him make more impact without sacrificing his advanced control of the strike zone.

He recovered from a slow start at Triple-A Norfolk to hit .304/.420/.515 with 18 home runs in 94 games. He won International League MVP honors and made his MLB debut in August.

Beavers continued to hit fastballs with Baltimore and connected for four home runs with a .775 OPS while maintaining a patient approach. He's firmly in the Orioles' outfield mix in 2026, along with **Colton Cowser**, **Taylor Ward** and **Tyler O'Neill**.

In the offseason, Beavers worked on improving his exit velocities and handling lefthanded pitchers.

—JON MEOLI

Arias Might Not Be Done Growing

Some players who reach the upper levels as teenagers possess advanced physical maturity that startles onlookers. Shortstop **Franklin Arias** was not one of them.

"He was swimming in that uniform," mused one evaluator who saw the 19-year-old Venezuelan at Double-A Portland.

Mindful of that reality, the 5-foot-11, 170-pound Arias was quick to identify further physical development and added strength as a central goal for his offseason.

Yet while more muscle and more power could elevate his prospect profile, he already possesses the highest floor of any Red Sox position prospect.

Defensively, Arias stands out for his instincts, IQ and excellent footwork, all of which give him the range to stick at shortstop despite speed that grades as below-average to fringy. He recognizes that his defense is advanced—and hopes to push the rest of the game to match it.

"You can't take anything for granted or settle," Arias said via interpreter. "I need to improve my other (skills) to the same level of my defense."

As a hitter, Arias has bat-to-ball skills that make him an outlier in the minors. Though he had a tremendous first year in the States in 2024, the Red Sox felt his attack angle was too steep, resulting in more swing-and-miss than expected given spectacular natural contact skills.

And so, in advance of the 2025 season, Arias stood more upright in the batter's box while leveling his swing.

The result: Across three full-season levels, he hit .278/.335/.388 with eight home runs in 116 games while forging a 10.1% strikeout rate, fifth lowest among all minor leaguers with at least 500 plate appearances.

He made contact with everything, running in-zone contact rates above 90% on both fastballs and secondaries.

With top-end exit velocities around 110 mph, Arias has sneaky power potential if he can simply get a bit stronger and occasionally get the ball in the air. Even if those adjustments don't happen, he could still position himself as a big league option by the end of this year.

—ALEX SPEIER

Schultz's Path To MLB Is Rooted In Recovery

Lefthander **Noah Schultz** is still 6-foot-10 with a funky, low arm slot. He is still just 22 years old and on track to debut in the majors this year.

And his numbers as a pro—3.06 ERA, 29% strikeout rate, 9% walk rate—still look pretty crisp even after a down 2025.

"Lots of ups and downs," Schultz said. "But I definitely think there are a lot of good things that I was happy I had to work through."

Still, last season's performance was troubling on two fronts. Schultz was hit hard in 2025, especially after a June promotion to Triple-A Charlotte. In five starts, he allowed 17 earned runs on 23 hits in 16.1 innings.

And after two years defined by elite strike-throwing, Schultz's walk rate climbed to 13.8 %. His signature slider, once one of the most dominant pitches in the minors, regressed to a 31.5% miss rate.

The White Sox think the explanation is twofold.

"One, the cutter was influencing his mechanics a little bit, and two, he really started to let us know the knee was bugging him," White Sox senior advisor to pitching **Brian Bannister** said.

"We were seeing a lot more fall-off toward third base in his delivery, and it was really him avoiding impact and load in the knee."

Schultz admitted that his patellar tendinitis in his right knee affected him throughout 2025, driving two injured list stints. A flare-up canceled a stint in the Arizona Fall League.

The White Sox had Schultz shelve his cutter midyear to relieve its effect on his slider. Their hope for a rebound is rooted in him ramping up without issue this spring after avoiding surgery.

"Physically he feels really, really good," White Sox farm director **Paul Janish** said. "Some of the things that he dealt with last year I think were really indicative of his ability to deal with things not being perfect.

"I think that's as significant as anything for a guy who hopefully is going to get the opportunity to go to the major league level at some point this year for the first time."

—JAMES FEGAN

Healthy Season Could Allow Bazzana To Shine

Until **Travis Bazzana** was selected by the Guardians with the first pick in the 2024 draft, Cleveland had never held the No. 1 overall pick.

Bryce Rainer SS, Tigers

Cleveland officials were excited about adding the Oregon State second baseman, a decorated college star, to their organization, but the 23-year-old Australia native is still a work in progress.

"Travis was plagued by some lingering injuries in his first two years in the organization," Guardians assistant GM **James Harris** said.

"But we are hopeful that the 2026 season will be one that allows him to show what team officials feel is a well-rounded skill set."

In his first two minor league seasons, Bazzana slashed .243/.384/.417 with 12 home runs and 17 stolen bases in 111 games.

"As a hitter, Travis has shown elite swing decisions and contact," Harris said, "while demonstrating the ability to impact the baseball.

"He continues to work on a consistent posture that allows him to reach his best bat speeds while staying adjustable."

Bazzana has played second base exclusively as a pro, but he has outfield experience in college and in summer leagues.

"Travis has put a lot of work into improving his ability to move laterally, and building arm strength," Harris said. "We have seen this work show up at second base this offseason."

The 6-foot, 196-pound Bazzana is a lefthanded hitter who should be able to bring at least average power production to a Guardians lineup that could definitely use some.

Bazzana's walk rate and on-base skills give him a solid foundation to build on as a potential future table-setter.

What position Bazzana eventually settles at remains to be seen—second base or outfield?—but his speed and athleticism have been a constant in allowing him to create offense.

—JIM INGRAHAM

Rainer Shows Personal Growth Amid Adversity

Looking back on the 2025 season, where most would likely feel frustration, **Bryce Rainer** has chosen to see growth.

Thirty-five games into his pro debut with Low-A Lakeland, the 2024 first-round shortstop suffered a season-ending shoulder injury.

Despite the obstacle, the 20-year-old had plenty of positives to take away from his condensed assignment.

"I thought the year was a big success, spring training included," Rainer said. "It was a great experience, and I got to meet a lot of people and play with some older guys and see how they play.

"Not the longest season ever, but definitely a successful year. I think in your first year of pro ball, the biggest thing is confidence. I thought that confidence really helped me last year with that part of the game."

After slashing .288/.383/.448 with 10 extra-base hits and nine stolen bases, Rainer's work on both sides of the ball demanded attention.

"He plays beyond his years," an American League scout said. "The body, the IQ, the confidence. Get him back to fighting strength, and that's a dangerous kid."

Navigating his rehabilitation journey, Rainer, a self-professed outdoorsman, turned to a variety of hobbies to maintain a healthy mindset, including daily walks and reading.

Rainer is a Los Angeles native who attended the same Harvard-Westlake High program that produced first-rounders **Max Fried** and **Lucas Giolito** in 2012, **Jack Flaherty** in 2014 and **Pete Crow-Armstrong** in 2020.

With a new and, more importantly, a healthier season fast approaching, the lefthanded-hitting Rainer is leaving the hurdles of last season behind and is optimistic about what awaits in his second chance at a full year.

"I'm hoping not to skip a beat and go into this year well," Rainer said. "I definitely have some personal goals, but I need to make sure I'm back on the field completely.

"Once that's all cleared away, I'm going to allow myself to come up with some goals for the year, but I think right now the goal is still making sure (my health) is all squared away."

—EMILY WALDON

Neyens Impresses Astros Ahead Of 2026 Pro Debut

Despite having just turned 19 in October, **Xavier Neyens** fit right in with the rest of the Astros' top prospects in January during an offseason camp in West Palm Beach, Fla.

The 21st overall draft pick last year drew raves from Astros GM **Dana Brown** and Hall of Famer **Jeff Bagwell**, a special assistant to owner **Jim Crane** who served as a guest instructor.

"He's an impressive kid," Bagwell said of Neyens, a product of Mount Vernon (Wash.) High. "He looks and acts like a professional, at a very young age, and he has great tools."

Brown smiled somewhat proudly as he discussed Neyens' showing at the club's minicamp for prospects.

"He could hit the ball just as far as all of those guys," Brown said. "I can say it's lefthanded power, which is more intriguing. He fit right in—not timid, aggressive, having good baseball conversations, jelling well with the team."

The Astros aren't represented on the preseason Top 100 Prospects, but Neyens is the top candidate to make the list at some point.

"I just saw him in early camp," Brown said. "He's a guy we think can play on the left side of the infield, most likely third base. He's got big lefthanded power, and he's a big dude with really good makeup.

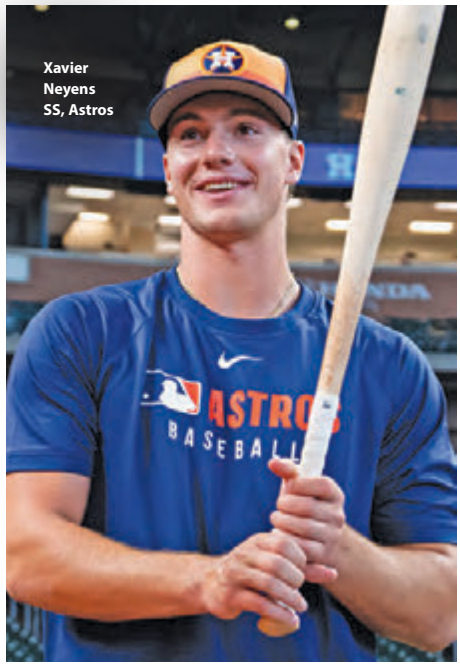
"He loves the game, and he seems to be dialed in from what I saw last week . . . down in camp."

As with most power hitters, Neyens faces some questions about his ability to both make contact and hit for power.

The Astros rave about his makeup and intangibles. Neyens appears to ask the right questions. Now, it's a matter of competing in spring training to give the organization an indication where he should start in 2026.

"He's young," Brown said of Neyens. "We got to let him come into camp, see what he looks like, see what kind of adjustments he made."

—JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ



Jensen Builds Off Fulfilling Boyhood Dream

Catcher **Carter Jensen** took arguably one of the biggest steps forward among prospects in 2025.

Heading into the 2025 season, Jensen did not rate as a Top 100 Prospect and ranked third on the Royals' list. He cracked the Top 100 barrier at midseason and now enters 2026 as the No. 11 prospect in the game.

Jensen excelled at both Double-A and Triple-A last season before receiving a September callup to his hometown team. He slashed .290/.377/.501 with 20 home runs in 111 minor league games, then went 18-for-60 (.300) with three homers in 20 big league games.

Jensen improved at the plate by better using all fields and increasing his hard-hit launch angle, building on his elite feel for the barrel and advanced swing decisions.

"I stopped worrying so much about the mechanics," Jensen said, "and now that it's all muscle memory . . . I can just worry about hitting the ball, just putting the bat on the ball, trusting my mechanics, trusting that I'm going to be in the right position."

Having been a lifelong Royals fan, especially of longtime catcher **Salvador Perez**, Jensen valued his month in Kansas City.

"Being around him and watching the way that he works and prepares for games," Jensen said, "not just physically but mentally also, it's special, and it's something that I'm trying to mimic. I'm trying to do the same as he does."

With the 35-year-old Perez heading into the twilight of his career, Jensen has the opportunity to get a significant amount of playing time in 2026, especially when the veteran catcher spends time at DH or fills in at first base.

Jensen realizes that he still has much to learn before he's a finished product, especially as a defender.

"Catching is always going to come first when you play that position," Jensen said. "(I'm) continuing to work on all aspects of defense, whether it's blocking, throwing, receiving, pitch-calling or game management."

—BILL MITCHELL

Bremner Could Be Another Quick-Moving Prospect

When the Angels drafted UC Santa Barbara righthander **Tyler Bremner** second overall last year, there was speculation that he might see the big leagues quickly.

The Angels have garnered a reputation of fast-tracking their top draft picks. **Chase Silseth**, **Zach Neto**, **Nolan Schanuel** and **Ryan Johnson**—who became the 24th player in MLB history to reach the majors without spending a day in the minors—being the first players from their drafts to reach the big leagues.

"What I understand is that if you're ready, they're going to send you," Bremner said in a post-draft interview. "Everyone wants to be a big leaguer, so the quicker I can get there, the better for me."

The Angels held off getting Bremner into any game action following the draft because of general arm soreness.

Getting his first pro reps at the Angels' prospect minicamp in January, Bremner threw in front of Angels brass, which included new manager **Kurt Suzuki** and new pitching coach **Mike Maddux**.

"Tyler has put himself in a really good spot with the work that he's done over the winter," Angels assistant GM **Joey Prebynski** said.

"The big thing for Tyler is to come into camp and continue building off the work that he's put in and just try to come in and continue to learn as much as he can."

Once Bremner arrives in Anaheim, he will provide needed strike-throwing that the Angels' rotation struggled with in 2025. They finished last in MLB with a 9.6% walk rate.

"He's elite at getting ahead with all three pitches," Prebynski said. "He was 65% on first-pitch strikes last year. He had a 6% walk rate, and for us it's just continued development of the repertoire and pitch usage and how he continues to sequence pitches."

"He has elite stuff and he shows feel for pitching and utilizing (his three pitch-arsenal). He can get outs to multiple quadrants of the zone, so we're excited to see him come to spring training and come in here and pitch."

—TAYLOR BLAKE WARD

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (RAINER), HOUSTON ASTROS/GETTY IMAGES (NEYENS)

Defensive Improvements Key Culpepper's Rise

When Twins front office officials reflect on **Kaelen Culpepper's** 2025 season, one of the first things brought up is how much he helped his teams win.

The 23-year-old shortstop led High-A Cedar Rapids to a first-half title in the Midwest League, and then he pushed Double-A Wichita to within a game of the Texas League playoffs.

"His makeup and his leadership on the field, the way he goes about his work, have all been exactly what we've been looking for," Twins GM **Jeremy Zoll** said.

The Twins drafted Culpepper 21st overall in 2024 out of Kansas State, and he has lived up to their highest hopes. He batted .289/.375/.469 with 20 home runs and 25 stolen bases in 113 games last season, winning the organization's minor league player of the year honors.

"I think the power has probably exceeded our expectations," Zoll said. "He knows the biggest thing for him is just cleaning up some chase on some sliders and refining his approach a little bit further."

The Twins invited Culpepper to his first major league spring training this year, and a strong start at Triple-A St. Paul could put him on the cusp of the big leagues. The Twins don't have much shortstop depth ahead of him.

"A big thing for him: He had some steps he took in a really positive direction to his shortstop defense, which we're really excited about," Twins farm director **Drew MacPhail** said. "He knows how important that is."

A priority for the Twins, particularly after their 72-90 season in 2025, is becoming more athletic and improving defensively, MacPhail said.

Culpepper, who has shown how much he can lift his minor league teams, could prove important to the Twins' plans this year.

"For us, the offensive year was really exciting," MacPhail said. "We all knew KC had that. But I think the strides he made defensively were really exciting and something he can hopefully build off."

—BOBBY NIGHTENGALE

Kaelen Culpepper SS, Twins

Lombard Learns From Initial Double-A Struggles

When the Yankees promoted shortstop **George Lombard Jr.** to Somerset in early May, the 19-year-old was the third-youngest player at Double-A, behind only the Rangers' **Sebastian Walcott** and the Angels' **Nelson Rada**.

While Lombard did not dominate the Eastern League as he had at High-A Hudson Valley in April, he finished the season batting .235/.367/.381 with nine home runs and 35 stolen bases in 132 games,

The Yankees were pleased with the progress made by Lombard, their 2023 first-rounder who is the son of former big leaguer and current Tigers bench coach **George Lombard**. His younger brother **Jacob** is a top draft prospect for 2026.

Lombard is a toolsy player who can handle shortstop and provide enough bat to be a regular. Once he reached Double-A, he would tend toward passivity and too often work himself into counts pitchers could exploit.

"Just the way he thinks the game is so advanced for where he is—that he's never going to be overmatched," Somerset hitting coach **Mike Fransoso** said.

"Also, there's just an adjustment to when you move levels, especially (to) Double-A, (which is a) big jump for young guys.

"So now it's just maybe some of the areas that are a weakness right now—or that are maybe a little bit of trouble—they just get exposed a little bit more when they move levels. And that's just a growing thing."

The Yankees rave about Lombard's maturity and clubhouse leadership at every turn, and expectations remain that he'll be able to rebound for a big 2026 campaign in a likely return to Double-A.

"I think what I've been able to take away from this year so far has helped me a ton, even if it meant that I had to go through some struggles, which I did," Lombard said in September.

"I think I learned a ton from it, and just now that I've already dealt with that, just going on in the future, I know what it feels like."

—MIKE ASHMORE

M's Expect Anderson 'Sooner Than Later'

Mariners fans likely won't have to wait long to see **Kade Anderson** on the mound at T-Mobile Park.

Seattle was thrilled when the 6-foot-2 LSU lefthander fell to them with the No. 3 pick in the 2025 draft.

After the Nationals took high school shortstop **Eli Willits** first overall and the Angels followed with UC Santa Barbara righthander **Tyler Bremner**, the Mariners draft room erupted in jubilation.

"He was our No. 1 guy going into the draft, and we were unbelievably grateful for him to fall to us," Mariners farm director **Justin Toole** said. ". . . My phone was blowing up when we took him, so that doesn't happen too often."

Anderson has not pitched in a competitive setting since his star turn for LSU in last year's College World Series, where he was named the Most Outstanding Player after striking out 10 in a 130-pitch complete game shutout against Coastal Carolina in Game One of the CWS finals.

Anderson's pitches include a 92-94 mph fastball, along with a strong curveball and a high-80s slider that helped him lead the NCAA with 180 strikeouts in 119 innings last season.

With a player as talented as Anderson, Toole admits that sometimes the coaches need to just stay out of the way.

But with a Mariners development staff that has produced so many top-flight pitchers in the past several seasons, Anderson should be in good hands.

"He's a phenomenal kid, extremely coachable, extremely intelligent, works hard, good teammate," Toole said. "I mean, he checks all the boxes you want . . . I'm excited to get down there and get our hands on him and get to work."

Assuming Anderson does what he seems capable of, the work shouldn't take too long.

"His performance and what he's able to do on the field will kind of dictate to us, you know, when he's ready," Toole said. "But definitely would anticipate it sooner than later."

—SHANE LANTZ

Hopkins' Athletic Background Translates

Righthander **Brody Hopkins** tends to wow observers first with his athleticism, a product of his status as a two-way player through college. He spent more time in the outfield than on the mound.

Then there's the competitiveness, a fire and gnawing drive to be the best at anything and everything he does. The 24-year-old proceeds with only one speed: all out.

The third element to his story now seems in place. Hopkins has refined his pitching tools—delivery, repertoire, approach and stuff—to the point where the only thing he lacks is control.

He walked 12% of batters at Double-A Montgomery last season, though he struck out nearly 29% and pitched to a 2.72 ERA in 116 innings.

Hopkins earned the right to show his stuff, including two fastballs, a variety of breaking pitches and a power changeup—in big league camp for the first time this spring.

"It's a power arm with a really big fastball," Rays assistant GM **Kevin Ibach** said. "He can spin two breaking balls. He's still working on the changeup right now, something to soften the velo there.

"But he's just super athletic. I think the athleticism itself is what stands out with Brody, and then the competitiveness.

The Rays acquired Hopkins from the Mariners at the 2024 trade deadline in the deal that sent **Randy Arozarena** to Seattle. The Mariners drafted him in the 2023 sixth round out of Winthrop.

"He's going to get after hitters right away, and he's going to compete out there," Ibach said. "I know a lot of pitchers take spring training as a build-up, but he's really only got one level—compete.

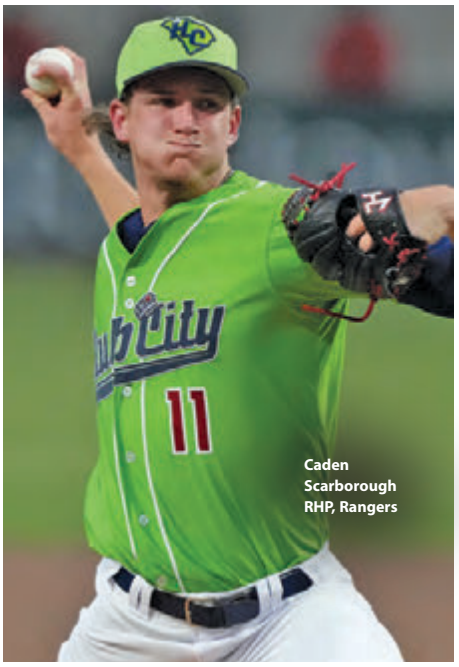
"So it'll be fun to get him around our major league staff."

Rays big league field staff will get their first extended look at Hopkins in spring training before he reports to Triple-A Durham.

—MARC TOPKIN

Scarborough Works To Refine A Third Pitch

The Rangers thought highly of righthander **Caden Scarborough** heading into his third pro season in 2025, but with just 10 pro innings on his ledger, he was still building his reputation as a prospect.



Caden Scarborough RHP, Rangers

Now, his status is secure. The 21-year-old Scarborough enters this season as the Rangers' No. 2 prospect and one of the best 100 in the game.

Scarborough has everything a touted prospect should. He is a 6-foot-5 athlete with a fastball that tops out at 97 mph and a sweeper that produced a 44% miss rate against Class A competition last year.

The Rangers won't be in a rush to move their 2023 sixth-round pick out of Harmony High in Florida, but with his tools and his feel for pitching, he might leave them no choice.

"Any time you go multiple levels with that kind of success, you're going to open eyes," Rangers GM **Ross Fenstermaker** said.

"He must continue to build off the foundation, but he's in a good place."

Scarborough opened at Low-A Hickory last season but needed an initial adjustment period. He had a 5.91 ERA after three starts, and the ERA was at 4.65 after 11 starts.

He took off from there, posting four straight scoreless outings and allowing just three runs in his final seven Carolina League starts, lowering his ERA to 2.89.

He tossed five no-hit innings in his finale, lowering his opponent average to .189. He struck out 97 in 75 innings. That was good enough to earn a promotion to High-A Hub City.

Scarborough didn't allow a run in three South Atlantic League starts and fanned 19 in 13 innings.

He threw his fastball for a strike two-thirds of the time and walked one or none in his final nine appearances.

His 27.1 K-BB% ranked sixth-best in the minors among pitchers with at least 70 innings.

The Rangers want to see Scarborough develop a third pitch, which he will need as he ascends to the upper minors, and he is seeing positive results with a split-changeup that still needs refining.

—JEFF WILSON

Nimmala Ready To 'Learn' And 'Absorb' In Camp

Back in October, **Arjun Nimmala** watched the Blue Jays' postseason run with fellow prospects attending the club's fall development camp.

Four months later, he's going to be at big league spring training with the defending American League champions.

"I'm super, super pumped to have the opportunity," said the 20-year-old shortstop. "I'm going to do my best to learn from the guys and absorb whatever they want to give me and whatever they're doing.

"I'm going to do my best to learn and understand what makes them so good and how I can emulate that."

The spring invite for the organization's top position prospect is the next step in Nimmala's progression after Toronto drafted him 20th overall in 2023 out of Strawberry Crest High in the Tampa area.

Last year at High-A Vancouver, he opened the season by batting .289/.372/.528 with nine home runs in 45 games through the season's first two months.

But he tapered off after, batting .184/.277/.290 with four homers in 75 games the rest of the way, while logging a career-high 120 games.

"I'm always going to be a hard worker. I always have that.

"But I think it was getting more used to playing more consistently and having those routines," Nimmala said of his dip in performance.

"And a very important part is definitely the mental part of the game. That needs to keep getting better and better for me."

To that end, part of Nimmala's focus in the offseason was on working on developing his game through visualization and self-talk, understanding "the importance of being positive."

"That is what allows you to get out of it quicker," he explained. "That positive mindset and the understanding that it's going to get better through my routines, through my consistency, through my positiveness."

—SHI DAVIDI

KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES (CULPEPPER), TOM PRIDDY/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (SCARBOROUGH)

National League

ORGANIZATION REPORTS

SPOTLIGHT ON TOP 100 PROSPECTS

PAGE 78 The Phillies have seen Aidan Miller come into his own as a player. Now, they need him to remain true to himself.

Waldschmidt Enters Camp With MLB Aspirations

The Diamondbacks have made no secret about their willingness to open the season with a prospect seeing time in left field, a scenario that would seem to bode well for **Ryan Waldschmidt**.

In the past, Waldschmidt said, he thinks his younger self would have been tense and started to press, trying to do everything he could to make the team. But he said he won't be entering camp at Salt River Fields with that mindset.

"I think over my college career I kind of learned that it's not about your performance, it's not about being always good," Waldschmidt said. "For me, you just have to be relaxed. I'm going into this without any expectations."

With **Lourdes Gurriel Jr.** recovering from major knee surgery, the D-backs are open to possibilities in left field.

Waldschmidt, the 31st overall pick in 2024 out of Kentucky, rocketed to the top of Arizona's prospect list—and into the Top 100—by hitting a combined .289/.419/.473 with 18 home runs and 29 stolen bases at High-A and Double-A.

He didn't just produce—he demonstrated an approach at the plate that suggested maturity beyond his years.

"My entire life, I think I've excelled at zone recognition, pitch recognition, as well as bat-to-ball," Waldschmidt said. "And I think as I got older it was about learning yourself and learning your strengths. I am a firm believer that as a baseball player you have to play to your strengths."

That mindset dovetails with a criticism he often hears about his swing being too steep, making it likely to be exploited at higher levels.

He acknowledges his somewhat uphill swing but said perceptions tend to be exaggerated based on his production on pitches at the bottom of the zone.

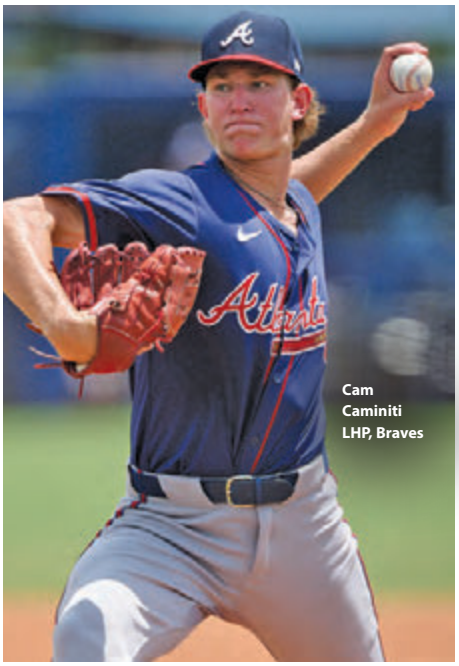
"It creates this illusion that I'm swinging up and that I only swing up," he said. "But when I'm trying to play to my strengths, that's where I'm looking. That's the pitch I'm trying to hit.

"I'm trying to hit that ball in the air for damage. To do that, you have to have a steeper path."

—NICK PIECORO

Caminiti Shows Frontline Potential

The Braves' farm system is loaded with compelling young pitchers, but one has separated himself from the pack.



Cam Caminiti LHP, Braves

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Still just 19 years old, lefthander **Cam Caminiti** oozes ability that has led some evaluators to project him as a frontline starter.

Caminiti fell to No. 24 overall in the 2024 draft, when he was the first high school pitcher selected.

He arrived at the right time for Atlanta, whose farm system has been reloaded in recent years after so many prospect graduations and trades during a lengthy period of contention.

Caminiti's appeal came from his four-pitch repertoire, seemingly effortless delivery, strikeout prowess and even bloodlines. He is the cousin of the late National League MVP **Ken Caminiti**.

"We learned (during the scouting process) that he's incredibly hardworking, super athletic and just really treats this already, at the age of 17, as a professional job," Braves scouting director **Ronit Shah** said.

Caminiti idolized **Madison Bumgarner**, which is apparent with his aggressive, bulldog-like mentality.

Stalled by some discomfort in spring, Caminiti logged 70 innings last year, primarily for Low-A Augusta. He posted a 3.09 ERA with 90 strikeouts and 28 walks.

It was a promising first full season, particularly in light of Caminiti's youth and the expectation that he'll continue growing into more strength and tapping into more on-field experience.

Naturally, the youngster needs a lot of refinement. His fastball is more advanced than his secondary pitches. His slider is awe-inducing at times and could be an electric out pitch. He also throws a curveball and changeup.

Caminiti's MLB debut is years away, but he's the most exciting pitcher in the system and has the best shot at becoming the franchise's next homegrown ace.

—GABE BURNS

Ballesteros Readies For Increased Role

During last September's playoff push, Cubs manager **Craig Counsell** trusted recent callup **Moises Ballesteros** in the cleanup spot eight times. The manager points to those games as examples of the faith the Venezuelan catcher earned with the organization.

"Moises did a great job last year, and we kind of asked a lot of him," Counsell said. "He showed us a lot."

Ballesteros served three stints in Chicago during the 2025 campaign, batting .298/.394/.474 across 20 games. At just 21 years old, he also struck out just 12 times in 66 big league plate appearances.

"There's a lot of contact, and the ball went all over the field," Counsell said. "He doesn't just have to pull the ball. It's going everywhere, and against all types of pitches. That's generally just a good formula."

Ballesteros showed more of the same during the other parts of his 2025 season with Triple-A Iowa, batting .316/.385/.473 across 114 games. It marked the highest batting average Ballesteros has posted at any minor league level.

"He's a natural hitter and has historically gone to the plate looking to attack pitches in the zone," Cubs farm director **Jason Kanzler** said. "Beyond his mechanics, which include impressive fluidity and balance given the swing dynamics, his edge is confidence, self-belief and aggression."

Counsell said the plan is for Ballesteros to catch more in 2026. He logged just six innings behind the plate with Chicago; all his other starts came as DH.

The quick development of his offensive game has currently outpaced his defensive opportunities. Ballesteros played just 303 games at catcher during his professional career.

While at Triple-A Iowa last year, he threw out just 13% of basestealers, significantly lower than the 21.6% average in the International League.

"Moises worked hard with our catching coaches and made strides behind the plate last year," Kanzler said. "I'm excited for what's to come as he gets additional opportunities behind the plate and grows as a major league backstop."

—BRYAN SMITH

Duno Proves His Worth While Remaining Healthy

After an impressive pro debut in the 2023 Dominican Summer League by **Alfredo Duno**, the Reds pushed him to full-season ball in 2024.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound catcher got off to a nice start, but a broken rib in May cost him the rest of the season, and he wound up playing just 32 games for Low-A Daytona. Duno returned to the Florida State League in 2025.

"We felt like if he went out, stayed on the field, stayed healthy, and was able to catch for the duration of the season, it would be a win," Reds farm director **Jeremy Farrell** said, "and he was able to do that.

"Going through the full season there in Daytona, and the things he learned about catching every day, the things that go into preparation and routine, and going out and performing like he did, it was a win all around."

Duno won the MVP award in the FSL after hitting .287/.430/.518 with 18 home runs in 113 games. He led the league in on-base percentage, slugging percentage, OPS, runs scored, doubles, home runs, RBIs and walks. He was second in the league in both hits and batting average.

Following the year, Duno participated in the Arizona Fall League. While he didn't hit much during his 15 games during the regular season, he came alive to hit four homers in three playoff games.

"He's still so young and has such limited time behind the plate in professional baseball," Farrell said. "We just feel like the more he catches, the more he's going to learn. The finer things that go into receiving and calling a game as well as understanding who he is as a hitter.

"(There are) times to take chances, reel in the aggression, use the whole field. With him, we just feel like the more reps, the more games played, he's going to continue to improve."

This season will be another step toward the big leagues for the 20-year-old Venezuelan backstop, where more experience and working on some of the little things will help round out his game.

—DOUG GRAY

Eduardo Quintero OF, Dodgers

Holliday Seeks Improved Timing This Season

"Makeup wise, he's 18 going on 28."

That was Low-A Fresno bench coach **Dave Keller's** assessment of **Ethan Holliday**, who made his pro debut there on Aug. 12 after the Rockies drafted him fourth overall in last year's draft.

Holliday's plus makeup is hardly surprising. Father **Matt** was a longtime major leaguer, and brother **Jackson**, taken first in the 2022 draft, is the Orioles' second baseman.

In 18 games at Fresno, Holliday hit .239/.357/.380 with two home runs, a 39.3 %strikeout rate and a 14.3% walk rate.

Keller traced Holliday's high strikeouts to fouling off pitches because he was late, a situation that will be rectified by improved timing.

The many foul balls resulted in Holliday's notable average of 4.36 pitches per plate appearance.

Improved timing will result from Holliday "getting comfortable to where his eyes understand how to get ready so he can catch up with pitches out front instead of getting caught a little bit too deep," Keller said.

"When his timing was right, he would foul the ball straight back. And then you know he's getting ready the way he's supposed to.

"The timing part of it comes with experience and for him to understand how it feels to make those adjustments."

Keller said by this season's end, Holliday "won't be fouling very many of those off like he did this past season. And two years from now, I think it'll get even better."

Holliday was solid at shortstop. But at 6-foot-4, 210 pounds, he'll likely outgrow the position. Many say that it will be third base or right field. Keller suggests otherwise.

"He really reminds me of (Gold Glove second baseman) **DJ LeMahieu**," said Keller, who was in the Cubs' organization when the 6-foot-3, 220-pound LeMahieu, began his career there before being traded to the Rockies.

"I think that he can play second base, and I think he's going to be a really good second baseman and going to be an offensive second baseman."

—JACK ETKIN

Quintero Goes From Sneaky Signing To Top Prospect

A teenage catcher signed to a modest bonus out of Venezuela is now the top-rated prospect in a talented Dodgers system.

The Dodgers moved **Eduardo Quintero** to the outfield after signing him for $297,500 in 2023. He has emerged as someone who could find himself patrolling center field at Dodger Stadium someday.

"His ability to look over a ball, the calmness in the box coupled with his ability to drive the ball makes for a very exciting offensive profile," Dodgers president of baseball operations **Andrew Friedman** said.

"And as soon as we moved him to the outfield, he displayed a real nose for the ball and instincts that made it look like he'd been playing there his whole life."

Quintero shined in the Arizona Complex League in 2024—he hit .330 with a .908 OPS while stealing 29 bases in 56 games.

He took another step forward at Low-A Rancho Cucamonga in 2025, hitting .306/.426/.533 with 14 home runs, 35 stolen bases and 65 walks in 83 games.

Despite being promoted to High-A Great Lakes in late July, Quintero won the California League's MVP award. All before turning 20.

Quintero will likely make the jump to Double-A at some point this season, the next challenge in the young outfielder's journey.

The Dodgers have a number of outfield prospects with bright futures. **Josue De Paula**, **Zyhir Hope** and **Mike Sirota** are fellow Top 100 Prospects, but Quintero's ability to play center field could set him apart.

"We have a number of very talented minor league outfield prospects. Only a few of them profile with the ability to play center field in the major leagues," Friedman said.

"We feel like what (Quintero) does in the box, on the bases and on defense gives him every chance as a young prospect to feature prominently in the middle of the field for us."

—BILL PLUNKETT

White Works On Arsenal To Accompany 'Elite' Fastball

When discussing lefthander **Thomas White**, Marlins assistant pitching coach **Rob Marcello's** first move is always to discuss his character.

"Forget about his stuff—everyone knows about that," Marcello said. "Thomas comes to work every day with the attitude of, 'I'm not good enough. I need to get better.'"

The 21-year-old White progressed through three levels last year, recording a 2.31 ERA in 21 starts, including two at Triple-A Jacksonville. He struck out 145 batters in 89.2 innings.

Marcello compares White to Mariners all-star **Logan Gilbert**, whom he coached in 2019 at High-A Modesto.

"Thomas probably has better stuff than what Logan had going into the big leagues," he said.

White and fellow lefty **Robby Snelling** are Miami's top two pitching prospects. Both are expected to arrive in the majors this year.

In fact, according to Marcello, White looks up to Snelling, who has always been slightly ahead in terms of development.

As for White's stuff, his fastball averages 95.5 mph and has touched 100.

"His four-seam is elite," Marcello said. "Guys just don't have a fastball like that unless it's (**Tarik**) **Skubal** or (**MacKenzie**) **Gore**."

Marcello said White has three secondary "weapons." He throws a mid-80s kick changeup, a low-80s sweeper and a slider that averages 86 mph.

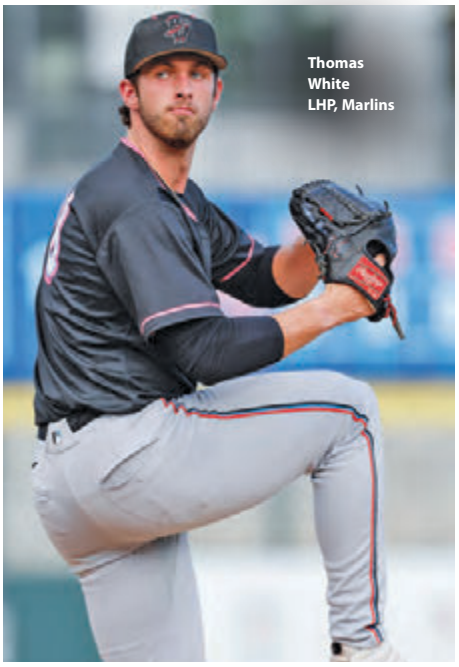
White added the changeup last spring. His slider is a work in progress as he works to increase its velocity and improve its shape.

Double-A Pensacola pitching coach **Jerad Eickhoff** made a subtle change to White's sweeper grip late last season, and big things happened.

"He was using a grip that had worked since high school," Eickhoff said. "We moved his grip about an inch, and it gave him additional horizontal break. He had trouble landing the pitch initially because it had so much movement.

"Thomas' fastball is easy gas. It looks like he's sleeping, and the ball just jumps out, defying your eyes."

—WALTER VILLA



Thomas White LHP, Marlins

Trade Creates New Opportunity For Williams

Jett Williams' offseason trade from the Mets to the Brewers in the **Freddy Peralta** deal represents a big opportunity for a new team.

Blocked at shortstop by all-star **Francisco Lindor**, the 22-year-old Williams will now get a shot at unseating **Joey Ortiz** in Milwaukee.

The Brewers also received prospect righthander **Brandon Sproat** in the Jan. 21 exchange, while the Mets added 27-year-old righty **Tobias Myers**.

Williams plays multiple positions, but his first shot with the Brewers will come at shortstop. Milwaukee likes Ortiz's defense, but his .593 OPS last season was the worst among qualifiers.

"Just showing up every day wherever they want to put me," Williams said of his expectations. "As of right now, it's at shortstop. But things can change, so just kind of going into it with an open mind of wherever they want to put me, I'll play."

Williams is coming off a productive season, one spent primarily at Double-A Binghamton. Overall, he batted .261/.363/.465 with 17 home runs and 34 stolen bases in 130 games.

Williams started 70 games at shortstop, 28 at second base and 25 in center field. He has the type of speed and versatility the Brewers covet, while his 5-foot-7, 175-pound stature has contributed to his upside being undersold.

The same is true of his new Brewers teammates Ortiz and **Sal Frelick**.

"I think that's kind of what made me the player I am today," Williams said of his diminutive stature. "Everybody says something, and kind of similar to the Brewers (players), the way they play with a little bit of a chip on their shoulder and scrappy."

The Mets drafted Williams 14th overall out of high school in the Dallas area in 2022.

"He's a gamer," Brewers president of baseball operations **Matt Arnold** said. "He's not that big, but he plays with a ton of heart and he's got incredible tools. He's one of the fastest players in the minor leagues."

—TODD ROSIAK

Benge Focuses Energy On Big Year Ahead

Before the offseason even truly began, Mets president of baseball operations **David Stearns** made one thing clear.

Outfielder **Carson Benge** would compete for a big league job in spring training. Stearns said as much at the GM meetings in November.

The 23-year-old Benge was the first player drafted by the Stearns front office, with the 19th overall pick in 2024. He starred as a two-way player at Oklahoma State, just like Mets top prospect **Nolan McLean**.

McLean made his mark on the mound and now ranks as the top pitching prospect in the game. Benge stars in the batter's box and ranks as the No. 3 outfield prospect in baseball.

The two OSU alums maintain a strong connection. McLean was one of the first people Benge texted when he got drafted.

"Hopefully, getting to play with him in MLB will be something special," Benge said.

Benge opened the 2025 season at High-A Brooklyn and thrived. He reached Double-A Binghamton in late June and Triple-A Syracuse in mid August. He batted .281/.385/.472 with 15 home runs and 22 stolen bases in 116 games.

"He can really hit," one scout said when assessing Benge.

In particular, he can really hit with two strikes. Benge hit six homers with a .611 OPS last year with two strikes. The MLB average in that split is .512.

"It doesn't bug me to hit with two strikes," Benge said. "It helps me do what I need to do. It helps me know not to expand."

With pro success behind him and a future in the big leagues ahead—most likely this season—Benge spent his offseason preparing his body for the grind of a long season.

He attended a Mets strength camp in the fall and then reported to spring training in early January to give himself the best shot to make the Opening Day roster.

"I know when I get up there, my bat will be able to play, and my glove will be able to play," Benge said.

"I'm focusing on staying healthy for the long season and doing what I can do to help my body."

—MATT EDDY

BILL MITCHELL (QUINTERO), DANNY PARKER/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (WHITE)

Miller's Key To Success Is Being Himself

Since the Phillies drafted **Aidan Miller** 27th overall in 2023, he has exclusively played shortstop.

But as the 21-year-old enters his second major league camp as a non-roster invitee, he's likely to see some time at other infield positions, too.

"If you look at our major league team, we have a lot of very good players in the infield, a lot of players who play every day," Phillies farm director **Luke Murton** said.

"So I think he'll continue to develop as a shortstop, but I think we'll mix in some third base, possibly some second, but we'll see what happens."

Miller finished the 2025 season on a high note. He had slumped at times at Double-A Reading, putting up a .650 OPS in July. However, he heated up in August, hitting .348 with a 1.083 OPS and earning a late-season promotion to Triple-A for eight games.

Miller tinkered with mechanical adjustments, including lowering his hands in his stance, but according to Murton, Miller's offensive turnaround was mostly due to his natural maturation as a player.

"You're talking about a really young player who got comfortable at a level where he was by far the youngest player, and is starting to learn how to understand who he is and figure out what he needs to do," Murton said.

Simultaneously, Miller revolutionized another aspect of his game. He stole 23 bases in 2024, and wanted to develop that tool even further. Together with minor league baserunning coordinator **Gary Cathcart**, Miller set a goal of stealing 30 bases.

He dedicated himself to his agility and timing, and ultimately ended the season with 59 steals.

Entering camp, Murton wants to see Miller play with the same confidence he displayed at the end of 2025.

"There are expectations on him to be a good player and do these things, but all he really needs to do is go out there and be who he is," he said. "That'd be plenty good enough for what we're looking for from him."

—LOCHLAHN MARCH

Hernandez Shows Promise Ahead Of Pro Debut

After drafting righthander **Seth Hernandez** sixth overall in 2025, the Pirates opted not to stretch him out, but he did throw during instructional league in the Dominican Republic.

Seth Hernandez RHP, Pirates

It wasn't much, but enough to make an impact on Pirates farm director **Michael Chernow**. "You see the ball out of the hand, I mean, it's explosive. It is absolutely explosive," he said.

"You see why the industry has dreamed on him. Obviously, it was short bursts, but you're seeing triple digits."

Hernandez can go four pitches deep, but his changeup is his bread-and-butter, and he immediately put it on display.

"His feel for his changeup," Chernow said. "I mean that really stood out, in terms of understanding at his age, why the pitch is moving the way it is, and the way he needs to adjust (finger) pressures."

Having a great changeup can really help Hernandez early in his pro career, when a lot of low-level hitters will not have seen a pitch of that caliber. He's also able to mix in three other pitches, a huge leg up for someone his age.

"They all look great coming out of the hand," Chernow said. "He does a really nice job in terms of throwing with intent. Some guys will try to make it look good on a Trackman plot, but the intent that he throws it with is above that age group."

Despite being advanced, Hernandez is still coming from the high school ranks, and Chernow recognizes that there will be challenges and things he will have to adjust to, but the fact that he has so much to offer now should make it easier to find the right mix.

"There's going to be changes that need to be made," Chernow said. "There's going to be punches and counter punches, right?

"So, the fact that he's got a really strong base positions him to continue to evolve from a higher baseline."

—ANTHONY MURPHY

Perseverance Pays Off For Athletic Baez

The word **Joshua Baez** used to describe the route he took the brink of the major leagues was "roller-coaster."

That suggests he's only about to accelerate.

Baez used the biggest breakout season in the Cardinals' organization last year to earn a 40-man roster spot and a place on the Top 100 Prospects.

The athletic, 22-year-old outfielder was one of the few hitters in the organization to hit at least 20 home runs, and he complemented that total with 54 stolen bases and an .884 OPS in a season spent primarily at Double-A Springfield.

"Going through the down times, yeah, it definitely questions you being drafted high and having all these expectations," said Baez, a 2021 second-round pick out of a Boston-area high school. "And then just hitting that brick wall. It just builds character.

"I found a way to get up and keep going every time."

When the Cardinals drafted Baez, he had size and strength to go with a whip-quick swing, strong arm and the athleticism to suggest he would be a quick study.

But Baez struggled with swing-and-miss early in his pro career. He struck out nearly 35% of the time in 2023 and 2024 at the Class A levels.

As Baez struggled at the lower levels, the Cardinals invested more money and more staffing into player development. The additional attention and facilities paid off.

Baez improved his contact rate in 2025, while also accessing his massive power.

The improvement was "more on mental cues, approach—not trying to do too much physical-wise," Baez said. "The body is there. So, I'm trying to put it all together."

In 2025, Baez slashed his strikeout rate to 20.6% while maintaining his power production and walk rate.

No Cardinals player blended power and speed like Baez. How he adjusts at Triple-A will indicate how soon the roller-coaster speeds to St. Louis.

"It gives you reassurance for sure," Baez said, "knowing that you're capable of those things in real numbers."

—DERRICK GOOLD

Salas' Injury Setbacks Don't Worry Padres

It's been more than two years since 19-year-old catcher **Ethan Salas** generated tangible momentum for his career.

He played in just 10 games last year as he dealt with a stress reaction in the lower right side of his back that pushed him to the injured list in April.

The Padres weighed pushing him back onto the field in the second half but ultimately played it safe in favor of a ramp-up for a normal spring training.

"He's 19 years old. This is all about the next 10 years," Padres president of baseball operations **A.J. Preller** said. ". . . We got to the (Arizona) Fall League, and I think we were hoping that that would be the time he would get started to play.

"I think instead of being 92% sure, let's be 99% sure . . . We're listening to our doctors and everything you can because it's about the next 10 years for him."

Salas signed for $5.6 million out of Venezuela in January 2023 as the top-rated prospect in that international class. He debuted at Low-A Lake Elsinore as a rare 16-year-old position player at a full-season affiliate.

He hit nine homers in 48 games to entice the Padres into a quick promotion to High-A Fort Wayne.

After nine games in High-A, he was bumped up to Double-A San Antonio. He spent all of 2024 back at Fort Wayne.

There, he continued to showcase Gold Glove-caliber skills behind the plate despite his bat lagging—.206/.288/.311—after opening the year as the youngest player in the Texas League.

Salas was also the youngest player in the TL to start 2025.

The Padres still believes the back issue is one that Salas can quickly put behind him.

"We've had a couple other players in the past who have had these stress reactions and we've gotten them back to performing and it hasn't been a long-term issue," Preller said. "I don't expect it to be for Ethan."

—JEFF SANDERS

Davidson Asserts Himself After Going Undrafted

Outfielder **Bo Davidson** hit .328/.438/.608 with Low-A San Jose in 2024, but those numbers were met with skepticism because a hamstring injury limited him to 53 games.

Bo Davidson OF, Giants

Whatever doubts existed about Davidson's potential likely vanished in 2025.

The lefthanded hitter slashed .281/.376/.468 with 18 home runs and 19 stolen bases in a combined 114 games for High-A Eugene and Double-A Richmond.

Davidson's 2025 season "really showed that he's a real, true talent, that he can adjust to new challenges and to new levels of competition," Giants farm director **Kyle Haines** said.

"I felt like it was really validation of the prestige and accolades he had earned in '24."

Haines likes Davidson's blend of bat-to-ball skills with blossoming power.

"(Davidson) isn't just a free-swinging hacker," Haines said. "He actually does have a good approach."

After spending the bulk of his time in left field in 2024, Davidson became a full-time center fielder last season.

Haines praised Davidson's improved "situational awareness" on defense and how he got "a better first step and read off the bat, which kind of comes with more experience."

Davidson's college experience before the Giants signed him as an undrafted player in July 2023 was limited to two junior college seasons at two North Carolina programs. He took a year off for personal reasons in 2022 in between seasons.

Haines said Davidson needs more at-bats against "premium pitching" but does see an upside to Davidson's relative inexperience.

"He's not maxed out at a younger age," Haines said. He added that some college players "peak at 20 or 21 and they are what they are. Whereas with Bo, you feel there's still a lot of development to go in his skill set."

The next step in Davidson's development will be how he adjusts as teams in the upper minors form more extensive scouting reports on him.

—STEVE KRONER

Ford Ready To 'Fight For A Spot' With Nationals

About two months into his tenure as Nationals president of baseball operations, **Paul Toboni** made his first trade.

The Nationals acquired a Top 100 Prospect who has a chance to win a share of the catching job.

Harry Ford, who made his major league debut with the Mariners as a 22-year-old in 2025, will compete with **Keibert Ruiz** and **Riley Adams** for a big league role with Washington, according to Toboni.

Ford and minor league righthander **Isaac Lyon** joined the Nationals in a deal for lefthanded reliever **Jose Ferrer**.

"It wasn't like we were sitting there looking to trade Jose," Toboni said. "At the same time, when we were presented with this opportunity, it was like 'OK, this is something we should pretty strongly consider.' "

In Seattle, Ford was blocked by American League MVP runner-up **Cal Raleigh**. With Washington, he'll have the opportunity to one day be the starting catcher.

Ford hit .283/.408/.460 with a career-high 16 home runs for Triple-A Tacoma last year, then went 1-for-6 with an RBI in eight major league games.

"I love that I'm going to get a chance to fight for a spot on the team," Ford said. "I know the other catchers, so I'm really glad and excited to get to work with them as well.

"But I am thankful for the chance to be, I guess, a little more in the conversation than in Seattle."

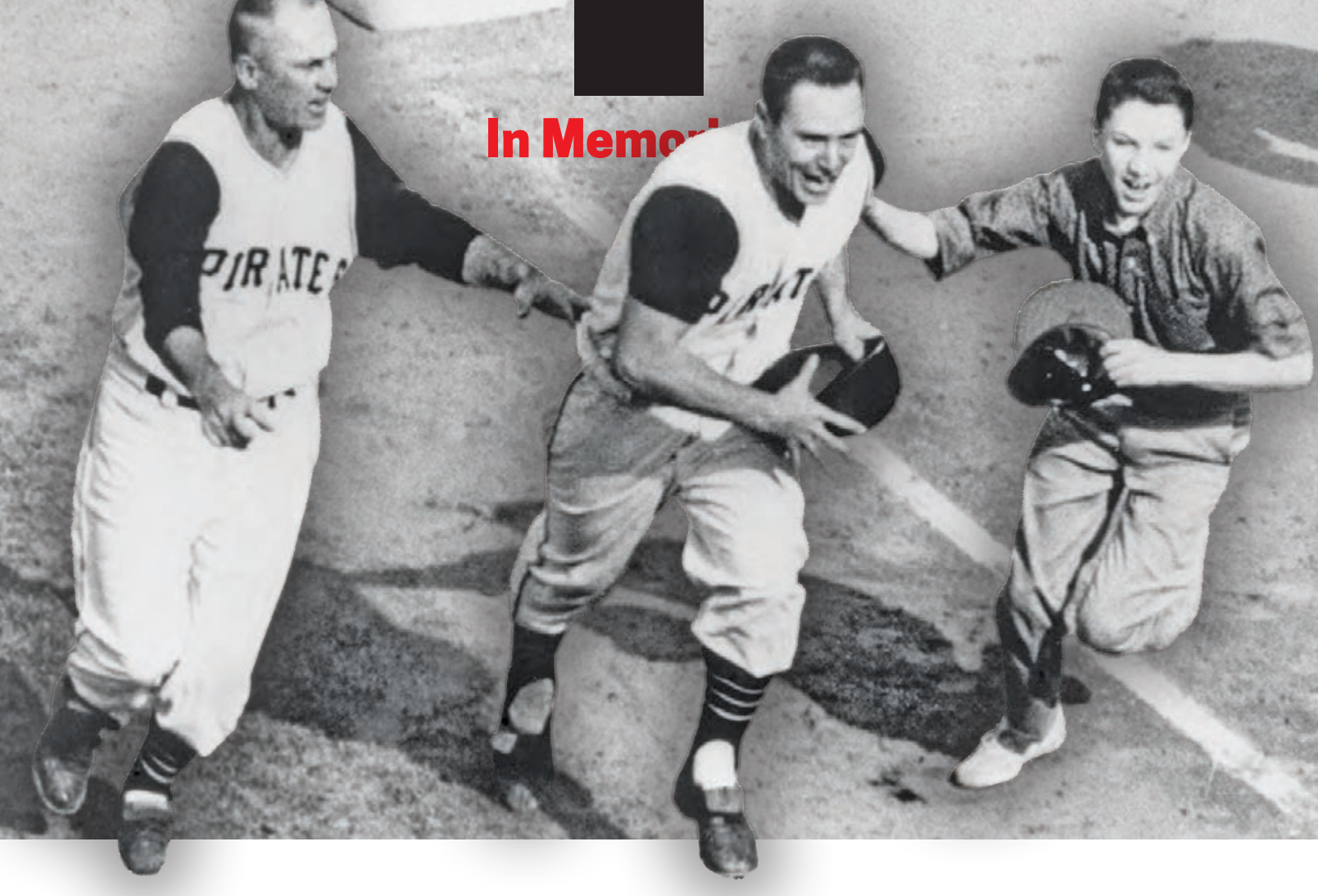
Ford, the 12th pick in the 2021 draft, stole 35 bases in Double-A in 2024 but just seven last season. He's familiar with the Nationals' core of young players, many of whom he grew up seeing on the elite travel circuit.

"I'm excited to get on a team with them, be on a young team and just start from scratch," Ford said. "I'm looking forward to building something."

Ford met the Nationals' media on Zoom from Oxford, England, where he was visiting family. He hit .308 with two home runs for Great Britain in the 2023 World Baseball Classic and is on their roster again this spring.

—LACY LUSK

LARRY GOREN/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (HERNANDEZ), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (DAVIDSON)



MAZEROSKI WALKED OFF 1960 SERIES

If Bill Mazeroski had only that one moment, he would still be remembered forever.

Leading off the bottom of the ninth inning in a tied Game 7 of the 1960 World Series, Mazeroski lifted a fly ball over the 406-foot sign in left-center field at Pittsburgh's Forbes Field. The home run gave the Pirates a 10-9 win against the Yankees and remains the only Game 7 walk-off homer in World Series history.

But Mazeroski's career had many more highlights beyond that unforgettable moment. He was an all-star in seven seasons and won eight Gold Gloves.

Mazeroski was considered one of the best defensive second basemen ever. He excelled at turning the double play and did so at a time when second basemen knew they were at risk of being knocked into left field every time they took a feed from the shortstop.

Mazeroski led the league in double plays in every season from 1960 to 1967, and his 1,706 career double plays are the most ever for a second baseman, nearly 100 more than No. 2 Nellie Fox.

A modest hitter, Mazeroski never hit 20 home runs in a season, drove in or scored 100 runs or stole even 10 bases. He batted .260/.299/.367 for his career and was about 15% less productive than an average hitter.

Mazerowski was inducted into the Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee in 2001. He died on Feb. 20. He was 89. ■

TERRANCE GORE SPED TO WORLD SERIES

Terrance Gore had the highest ratio of postseason success to regular season playing time in MLB history. He logged just 85 regular season plate appearances, but he was on the roster of three World Series champions. He earned those roster spots because henwas one of the fastest and best basestealers of the 21st century.

A 20th-round pick of the Royals in 2011, Gore was added to Kansas City's roster for its 2014 postseason run. He stole three bases in three tries and scored two runs in six appearances that year. The following year, he was once again a pinch-runner for the Royals, that year's champions.

Gore then became a baserunner for hire. He joined the Cubs for their postseason run in 2018. The Dodgers signed him in 2020. While he played in just two games for the club, he won his second World Series title. He joined the Braves the following season and earned a third ring. He signed with the Mets in 2022, and his final MLB appearance was as a pinch-runner in that year's Wild Card Series.

Gore died on Feb. 6 following complications from a routine surgery. He was 34. ■

In Memoriam

written by JJ COOPER

LOLICH FOUND DURABILITY, DOMINANCE

Mickey Lolich was a lefthander with an excellent curveball and exceptional durability. From age 23 to age 35, he made at least 30 starts in every season.

As durable as he was, he also had plenty of highlights that stick with Tigers fans more than a half century later. He will always be remembered for 1968 and 1971.

The 1968 season wasn't Lolich's best. Denny McLain won 31 games that year and was the Tigers' ace. After Lolich failed to reach the fifth inning in back-to-back starts, he was moved to the bullpen for the first half of August. He threw five scoreless innings to finish a 14-inning win against Boston and 5.2 scoreless relief innings to beat Cleveland, which helped him regain his spot in the rotation.

That move set up the highlight of Lolich's career. In the 1968 World Series, he threw a complete-game six-hitter to beat the Cardinals in Game 2, and even homered in that game. He threw another complete game in Game 5 as the Tigers won 5-3. And then he threw *another* complete game to win Game 7, outdueling Bob Gibson to win 4-1.

Three starts, 27 innings, three wins and a World Series MVP award.

Lolich's best season came in 1971. After leading the American League in losses in 1970, he followed that with an AL-best 25 wins and finished second in Cy Young Award voting and fifth in the MVP vote.

Lolich made 45 starts and threw 29 complete games as he led the league with 376 innings and 308 strikeouts. That total is the most innings any pitcher has thrown in an AL season since the Deadball Era, other than Wilbur Wood's 376.2 innings in 1972.

Lolich finished his career with a 217-191 record and a 3.44 ERA. He was a three-time all-star. He died on Feb. 4. He was 85. ■

WILBUR WOOD DOMINATED THANKS TO KNUCKLEBALL

Knuckleballers are a special breed, but even among knuckleballers, Wilbur Wood was truly special.

Wood was developed as a much more conventional lefthander with a fastball and a curveball, but he never stuck for long in the majors with the Red Sox or Pirates.

His career didn't take off until he learned the knuckleball. He became a dominating reliever at a time when that wasn't really even a role. No one could hit Wood, and because he threw a knuckleball, there was rarely a day when Wood wasn't available.

He made 88 relief appearances in 1968, earning MVP votes with his 13-12, 1.87 season for the White Sox. He followed with two more excellent seasons in the pen.

In 1971, the struggling White Sox moved Wood to the rotation, which unlocked another aspect of his career. He went 22-13, 1.91 in 1971 and finished third in the Cy Young Award voting. The following year was even better. He threw an amazing 376.2 innings, the most by any pitcher since the Deadball Era, going 24-17, 2.51 in 49 starts. Wood's total could have been even greater, but a brief players' strike at the start of the season meant the White Sox played just 154 games. In a normal 162-game schedule, Wood likely would have received two or three more starts.

Second in Cy Young Award voting in 1972, Wood earned Cy votes again in 1973 when he went 24-20, 3.46 in 48 starts. A comebacker from Ron LeFlore in 1976 shattered his kneecap. He was never the same after that, and his career ended after the 1978 season. Wood's success was limited to a nine-season stretch from 1967 to 1975, but his durability helped him pack a career into a decade.

Wood finished at 164-156 with a 3.24 ERA and 2,684 innings. He was a three-time all-star. Wood died on Jan. 17. He was 84. ■

PHOTO BY MLB VIA GETTY IMAGES (MAZEROSKI), DILIP VISHWANAT/GETTY IMAGES (GORE), SPX/DIAMOND IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES (LOLICH), BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (WOOD)

PERSPECTIVE

SAVE OUR STARS

We propose one idea to help keep smaller-revenue clubs and their superstar players united up until free agency

The low-revenue Tigers had to at least *consider* trading ace Tarik Skubal prior to free agency.

J.J. COOPER
@JJCOOP36

The 2026 season will be played under the backdrop of an impending Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiation.

The expectation is that MLB owners will once again push strongly for a salary cap. The players' union is expected to forcefully fight against that proposal.

But in every CBA negotiation, there are smaller ideas that can improve the game that both sides can see as beneficial, which makes it easier for both sides to agree to these more modest tweaks.

One of the current issues I consistently hear about from fans of smaller-revenue teams is the concern that their team's stars are going to be traded.

This year, talk centered on the Tigers and whether they should hold onto Tarik Skubal or trade him before he reaches free agency in November. Similarly, some wonder how long Paul Skenes will remain a Pirate, even though he is under team control through 2029.

In no logical world would trading Skubal help the Tigers in 2026, and Detroit had made no indication that it is looking to trade the back-to-back American League Cy Young Award winner. But it remains an open question because of the glaring disparity between what Skubal would garner in a trade and what the Tigers will get if they offer him a qualifying offer after the season and he leaves as a free agent.

If the Tigers trade Skubal right now, they likely could receive multiple elite prospects and/or young established major leaguers in return. While it would clearly hurt the team's chances of winning it all in 2026, it would potentially help them in 2027 and beyond.

If Skubal walks after the season, the Tigers will receive a compensation draft pick that follows round one and any potential Prospect Promotion Incentive picks. In most years, that falls in the range of picks 28 to 32.

That scenario would also add more than $2 million to Detroit's draft bonus pool for 2027, but the hit rate on a pick in that range is small. While pick 32 has produced Aaron Judge, Will Smith, Jose Berrios and Ke'Bryan Hayes since 2012, picks 28 to 31 combined have failed to produce a player who has reached 10 career bWAR in that time frame.

The value of that compensatory pick is pennies on the dollar compared to what a healthy Skubal would garner in a trade.

Creating an incentive system that narrows the compensation difference between what a team gets for trading a star and what it gets by keeping the player until he hits free agency would help reduce that problem.

The exact parameters would be tricky. This should be a system for bona fide stars, not solid players. My idea is to limit it to players who have finished in the top three in Cy Young Award voting or the top 10 in MVP voting in one of the three most recent seasons before the player hits free agency.

Skubal would easily qualify. Paul Skenes would likely be a slam-dunk qualifier as well. A player like Trevor Story, a free agent after the 2021 season, would fall on the other side of the equation.

This hypothetical compensation would only be for teams who have held onto that star for three or more seasons before he reaches free agency. And this compensation should not come at the expense of the team that signs the star free agent. MLB owners have often used the free agent compensation system as a punishment for the signing team, which also reduces a player's negotiating leverage.

Teams whose payrolls exceed the Competitive Balance Tax threshold would not be eligible for compensation. This isn't intended as a system to give the Dodgers compensation for a departing free agent. It's a system to encourage the Rays or Pirates to hold onto their stars for longer.

My proposal is to give the eligible team that loses a qualifying star free agent the eighth spot in the next draft lottery. If there are multiple stars who hit free agency, a ratings system could determine which team gets the first of the draft lottery spots, but in many years no one would qualify.

In a typical season, one free agent at most would meet the criteria. In those years, there would be 19 lottery spots rather than 18, which is the number of non-playoff teams.

That doesn't mean that the team would get the eighth pick. It would give them that spot in the lottery. If they get lucky, they could pick No. 1 overall. If they are unlucky, the pick could slide into the low teens. The Cardinals had the eighth-best odds in the most recent draft lottery, yet they pick 13th in 2026. In the previous draft lottery, the Cardinals once again had the eighth-best odds. That time, they won the lottery to pick sixth.

Landing a draft pick in that range is no guarantee of getting a future star. There are many more Benny Montgomerys and Matt Mannings picked in that range than Ian Happs or Konnor Griffins. But a chance at a pick in this range gets much closer to matching the compensation a star can receive in a trade.

The chance of picking at the top of the draft and the assurance of getting to pick in the top half of the first round would go a long way toward making it advantageous to hold onto a star rather than deal him.

That's not only good for small market fans, but for all of baseball. ■

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